

*A Gift  
for  
Generations*

# Cahaba



*An Historical Folio  
Revealing the Heart River of Alabama*



# Cahaba

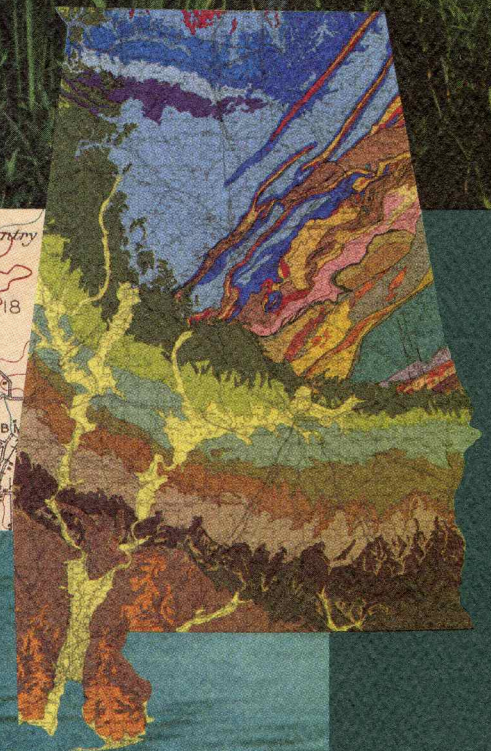
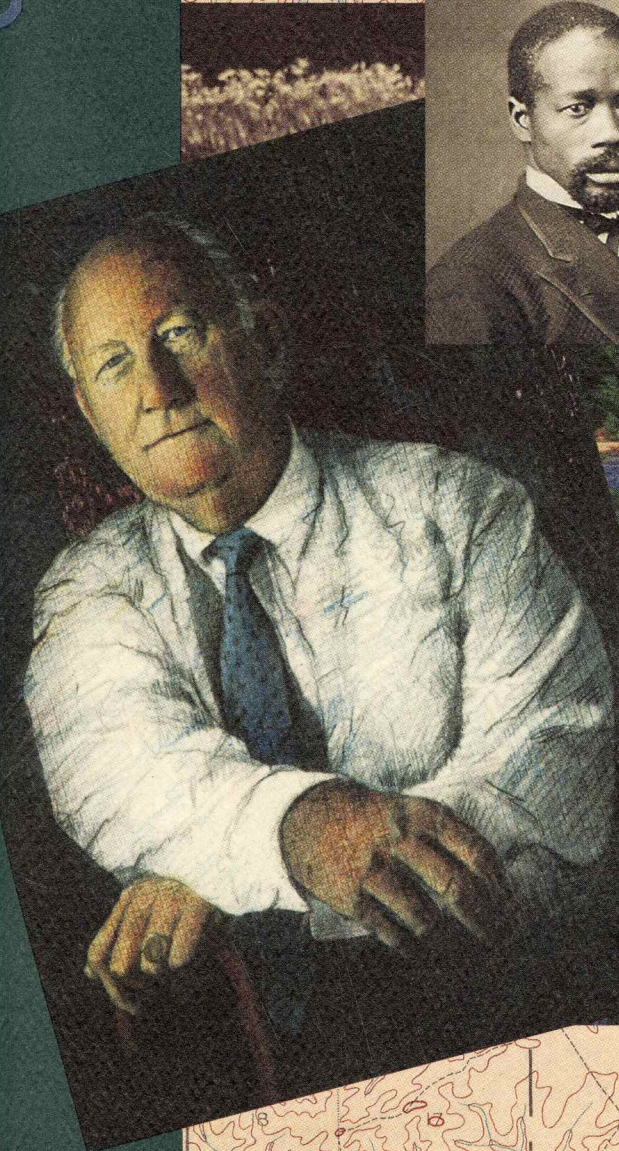
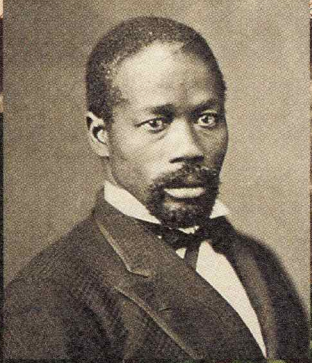
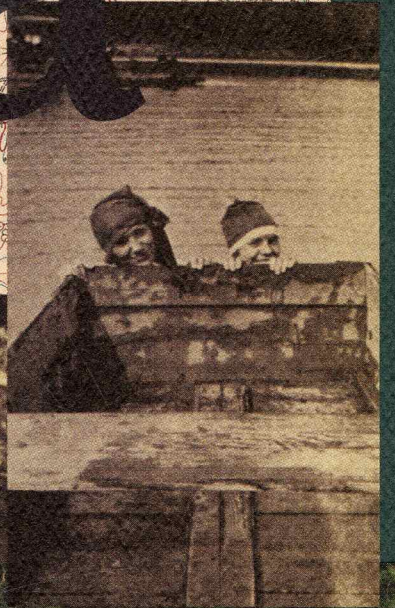
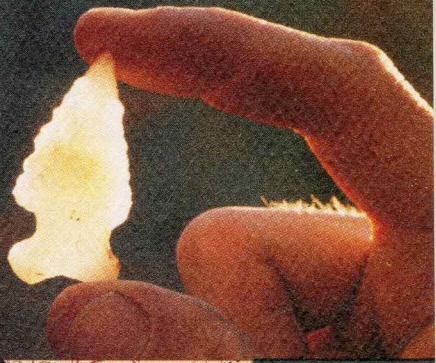
## *A Gift for Generations*

If ever a river symbolized the great natural beauty, heritage, and environmental diversity of Alabama, it is the Cahaba. The crown jewel of the Mobile River system, the Cahaba's 1,870 square mile watershed courses through the geographical heart and soul of Alabama. For countless generations, the river supported an immense variety of plants and animals in a perfect, self-renewing cycle of life. For more than 10,000 years, the river has also served those humans who have lived and worked along its course. It provides transportation, fish and game, beauty, recreation, and perhaps above all, a clean, healthy, and abundant source of drinking water. Beginning as a trickle in St. Clair County, 190 miles later the Cahaba joins the Alabama River near Selma, culminating in the longest free-flowing river remaining in Alabama. Though the river is nationally known for its tremendous biological diversity, many Alabamians are just now discovering the hidden wonders this state treasure holds. From the first capital at the river's mouth to the birth and renaissance of Birmingham at its headwaters, the Cahaba River remains a resource for growth and natural beauty. We at the Cahaba River Society and the Cahaba Trace Commission present this historical folio in hopes of protecting and preserving both the river and the region's rich environmental and historical legacy.



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# Cahaba



*A Collection of Essays Exploring the  
Cahaba River Valley Past, Present, and Future*





## The Cahaba River Society

The Cahaba River Society is Alabama's largest river protection organization. Founded in 1988-89, the society emphasizes education and consensus-building among diverse interests. Combining expertise in the science of river ecosystems with a practical understanding of the forces of urban growth and development, the society builds partnerships to increase the resources brought to bear on river problems. The society encourages people to take responsibility for the environment in their own backyard.



## The Cahaba Trace Commission

In 1985, the commission was established to help promote the historical, cultural, and diverse environmental attributes in each of 11 counties along or adjacent to the historic Cahaba River Valley. Stretching from the wellsprings of the Cahaba near Trussville to the vine-clad ruins of Old Cahawba, every site on the trace has a story to tell about the early formation of Alabama. By following the trace route as it winds about the scenic Cahaba River, visitors can travel through a region that dramatically chronicles Alabama – past, present, and future.

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The Cahaba River nurtures  
all its inhabitants  
past, present and future.

**The Cahaba River Society**  
and  
**The Cahaba  
Trace Commission**  
would like to thank  
all those who made  
this publication possible.

**Cahaba**

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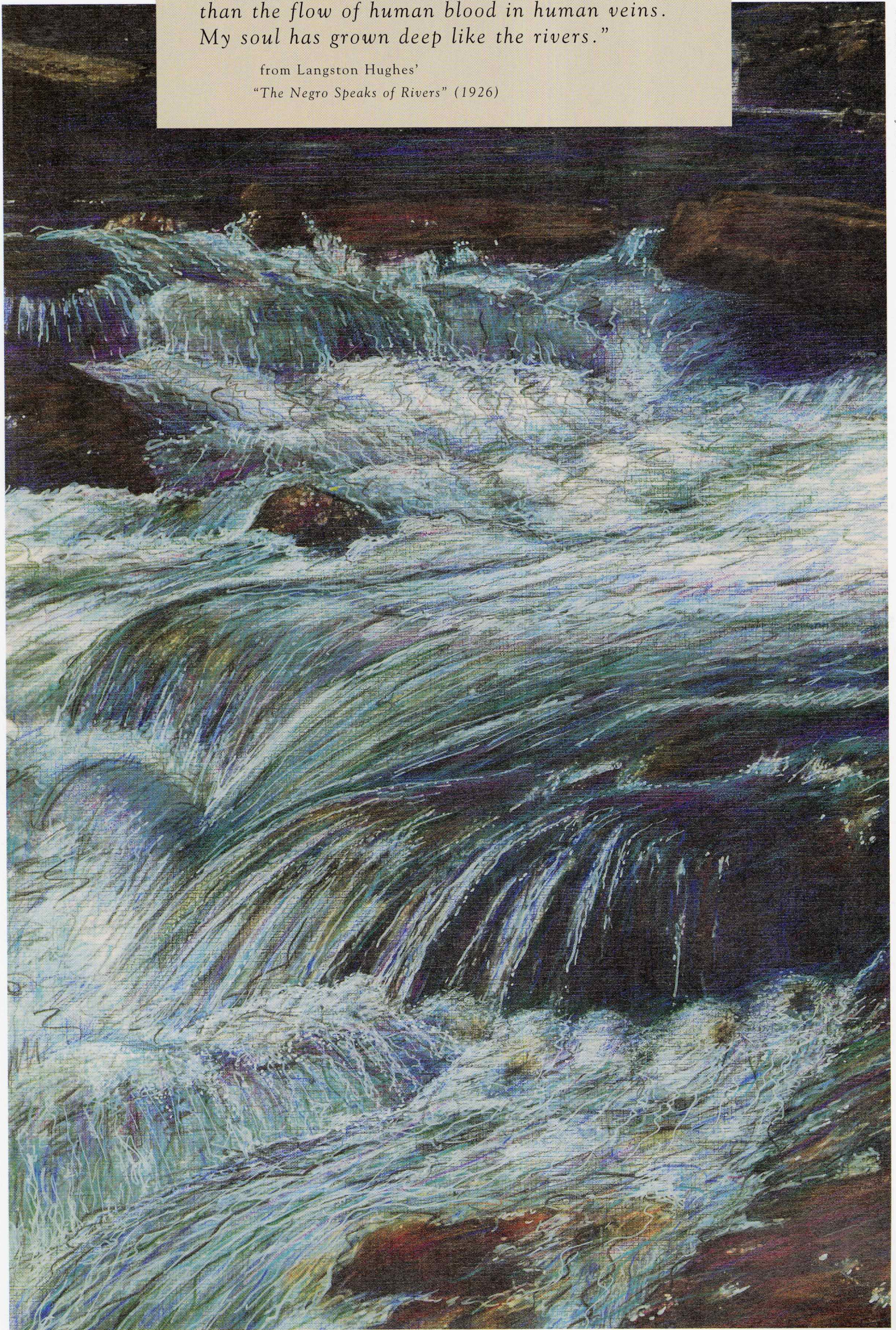






"I've known rivers:  
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older  
than the flow of human blood in human veins.  
My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

from Langston Hughes'  
"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1926)



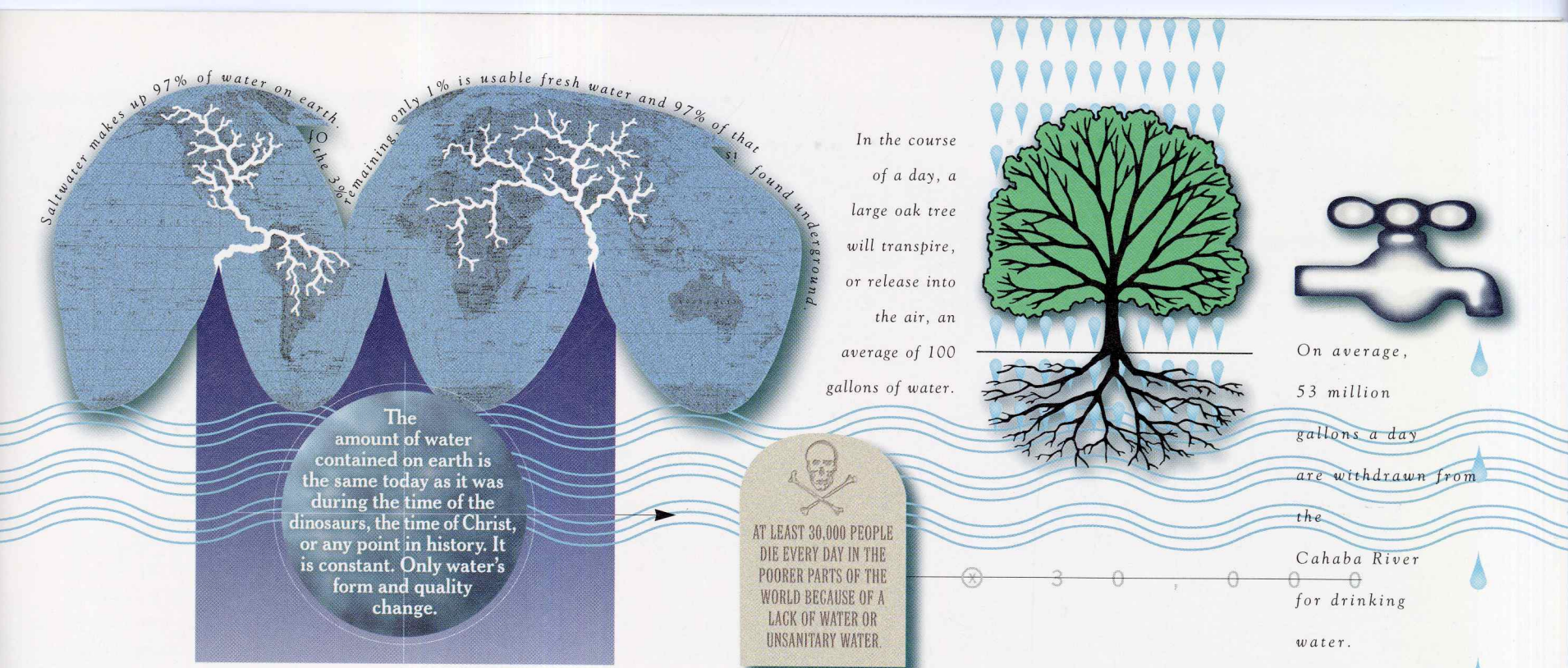
© Photocore 1997 Guy Arello

The word "Cahaba" derives from the Choctaw language meaning "water above." It is the heart river in a region currently named Alabama. Both names are remnants of the natives who once lived here, but like those who came before, the soul of the Cahaba nurtures all its inhabitants, past, present and future. As the Cahaba River Society approaches its tenth anniversary, we present this collection of essays written by Todd Keith in the hopes of creating a greater awareness about this magnificent American river. In realizing the countless interdependencies we share with the Cahaba, the Society hopes we all come to recognize the vital role we play as stewards of the river in the coming millennium.

Blessed Be the Cahaba—A Gift for Generations . . .

*Guy Arello*





# ALABAMA: A Wealth of Water

The use of water in literature, language, and daily life is at once a fundamental and readily understood symbol: quite simply, water is Life. In Greek mythology, the great Titan, Ocean, flowed around the earth providing a steady supply of life-nourishing water to all the world's rivers. The Dawn, Sun, and Moon rose from Ocean in the east, giving life to both gods and Greeks by making Ocean the source of energy that creates life itself. One of the first references in Genesis is to water. The Ganges River, worshiped by the Hindus living beside it, attracts millions who make a pilgrimage to its holy source to have their sins washed away at least once during their lifetime.

For those living near the Mississippi (or 'Misi Sipi' meaning 'Father of Waters'), the river provided both for crops and their transport as well as occasionally destroying settlements lying in its ever-changing, snake-like path. As in the spiritual "Old Man River," for American slaves, the river came to represent a perverse reversal of water as a symbol of life as the Mississippi seemed the embodiment of their servitude. Because of its immensity, its grandeur, and vital importance for all those living near, water suffices to bear the symbolic onus of man's need for expression.

On a smaller, more immediate scope, water informs our everyday language and expressions. Comparisons are employed where one may "gush like a fountain," or be "as deep as the sea." When things go well, we are "overflowing" with good fortune. Our cup is full. Things are right as rain. At our most tragic moments we shed tears, a physical and spiritual metaphor all the more ironic since we are, after all, essentially vessels for water and the loss of just 10% of our moisture can be life-threatening. Perhaps the most common image of purity used in advertising is a mountain spring, glacial snow-capped peaks, or simply free-flowing water. Spring, the return to life, is announced by the melting and breaking of frozen streams and rivers, the torrent of water returning to the land. The absence of life, sterility and desolation, is the absence of life-nurturing water, hence the desert's symbolic nature. In Exodus, God turns the Nile red with blood, inverting the symbol of blood as a life force. The power of water as an image and metaphor is as inescapable as the myriad of physical uses to which man employs this, the universal solvent.

As a chemical compound water is unique. Because of the stability of the water molecule, water does not break down into hydrogen and oxygen atoms in chemical reactions, making it invaluable as the basis for scientific experiments as well as for the chemical industry which relies on water to dilute and disperse toxic waste products. Water freezes from the surface down as reactions between oxygen and hydrogen cause water to become less dense as it forms ice. Water is the only liquid to do this as it freezes. This is fortunate, because if ice sank instead of floated, bodies of water around the world would freeze from the bottom up until all was frozen, making life as we know it impossible.

Indeed, it is the invisible moisture in the air we breathe that makes life possible: our lungs cannot work unless they are kept continually moist by water vapor. The hydrologic cycle, or water cycle as it is commonly called, is the process by which water

moves in a continuing pattern from air to land and back again fueled by the sun's energy. Everyone remembers the cut away diagram from 4th grade science: vapor condenses in clouds, falls to the earth, and what does not sink below the soil into the water table evaporates back into the atmosphere ad infinitum. A perfect circle of evaporation, precipitation, and purification never ending. So perfect, in fact, that the quantity of water present on Earth is constant, the same today as it was thousands of years ago. Add mankind to the equation, and the only thing that changes is water quality as our demands on water—sewage treatment, chemical, industrial, or personal consumption—push beyond the cycle's capacity to purify and replenish itself. Quite simply, we have reached the point, perhaps for the first time in history, where man's use of water imperils the cycle.

Some things never change. With our bodies made up of 60 to 70% water, daily water intake is obviously necessary. It should come as no surprise that Americans use more water per person than anyone else in the world—about 2,000 gallons per person per day to grow the food we eat, make the energy to run air conditioners, lights, and manufacture the goods we consume—twice the average we used in 1950. As a point of comparison, some poorer, less developed nations may use as little as 10 gallons per person. We tend to think of water as an inexhaustible resource, that is, when we think of it at all. You turn on the faucet, and water pours. It is always there. But the ways in which it arrives there becomes more circuitous and bizarre as our demand and dependence grows greater.

A city like New York uses 6,000 miles of pipes, some 14 feet wide buried 800 feet deep, to supply 1.5 billion gallons per day to the city from as far away as the Catskill Mountains 100 miles to the north. In some cities, all the water used in their homes has been recycled, so that people drink and cook with the water they have bathed in and flushed down their toilets a few days or weeks earlier. In California, water is pumped up and over a 3,000 foot ridge of the Tehachapi Mountains, defying gravity as part of a 600-mile state water project. The 1987-93 drought in California was so severe it had residents painting their yards "oasis green" in biodegradable dye to cover up their dying lawns. Right now, agriculture uses a massive 80% of captured runoff in California, but in a state gaining 500,000 people each year while its underground aquifers are being drained faster than rainfall can replenish them, this will change. Today, the Golden State faces tough choices on how it wants to balance its relatively scant water supplies between agricultural, urban, and environmental uses.

Alabama is much more fortunate with regards to water than most states. By choosing to highlight Alabama's rivers on our state seal, the first state legislature chose what they felt to be Alabama's most significant attribute. They were not wrong. A full 8% of the water that flows in America flows in Alabama. For Native Americans, colonialists, settlers, and citizens, until just prior to the Civil War, the region's vast river system offered an intricate array of highways for travel by canoe, flatboat, barge, or steamer. Until the primacy of the railroads, Alabama's waterways were unparalleled in terms of

a transportation network. Today, we have more navigable waterways than any other state, yet those 1,438 miles come at a price. The water above a dam becomes deeper and significantly cooler, slowing or ceasing altogether the reproductive cycles of animals such as mussels, snails, and fish. A loss of current also means poorly oxygenated water which can further make life difficult for such aquatic species, that is if they can still migrate up or downstream. With 16 navigation dams, 16 hydroelectric power plant dams, at least 20 additional major impoundments, and nearly 1,700 smaller dams, we have turned many of our major rivers into managed waterways for transportation and power generation. Certainly, these dams have generated much-needed power for an underdeveloped region, helped provide water to municipalities, assisted in reducing flood damage, and eased navigation which in turn encourages commerce and recreation. However, few would agree that a need exists for many more impoundments in the Alabama river system, especially on the Cahaba River.

For 190 miles, the Cahaba River remains the longest free-flowing river left in Alabama. The river is open and largely unfettered from its source near Trussville to where it joins the Alabama River at the site of the state's first capital, Cahawba. Though the Birmingham Water Works built a diversion dam below the confluence of the Little Cahaba River in Jefferson County, the Cahaba endures as the endangered gem of Alabama and America's once-great rivers. For nearly 1 million Alabamians, when you turn on your tap water, run a dishwasher, wash your car, flush a toilet, or wash clothes, it is largely the Cahaba you depend upon. For Birmingham and surrounding areas, your drinking water is only as good as the Cahaba River is allowed to be. If someone told you 10 or 20 years ago that by the 1980's people would be paying upwards of \$1 for a 16-ounce bottle of water, you might have laughed at the idea. But taking the rising stock of bottled water as just one example of the changing definition of what water means to us, one begins to sense that at some basic level, the way we look at and use water in our daily lives is undergoing a profound change. Crucial to maintaining quality of life amidst such turmoil is that the Cahaba be preserved. Only then may the river continue serving the various needs for which so many Alabamians already depend upon the Cahaba.

Cahaba River Society Director Beth Stewart is more direct in her estimation of the river's importance to those who depend on it. "When you lift your children and grandchildren to put them in bed at night, most of what you hold in your arms is the Cahaba River. Safeguarding the health of our water source is very important to the long-term health of our families."

One-fourth of  
 Alabama's population  
 drinks, cooks with,  
 and bathes in  
 the Cahaba River  
 every day.





# RIVERS OF

# LIFE: MOUNDVILLE

The geographical unit we call "Alabama" has seen continuous human habitation for some 10-12,000 years. During such an expanse of time, Native Americans relied on many of the same resources we do today: clean water for drinking, fishing, transportation, and the cultivation of crops; an abundance of herbs, nuts, fruits, and wild game for food; and timber as a source of energy and shelter. The basic necessities of life remain a constant. Technology and time may alter the needs that determine our lifestyle but not the basic substance.

The last prehistoric stage before the entrance of Europeans, the Mississippian Stage (roughly AD 1050-1540), is characterized by the beginnings of intensive agriculture, large sedentary towns, hereditary leadership in the form of chiefdoms, and large-scale monument building. For perhaps the first time in North American prehistory, elite groups in society held political, spiritual, and economic sway over large numbers of people and communities. At its height in AD 1300, the Mississippian city of Moundville was the single largest community north of Mexico. Some 29 mounds covering 185 acres were surrounded by a palisade wall on three sides. The total population may have reached as many as 1,500. Thanks to more than a century of field work by his predecessors, Moundville scholar Christopher S. Peebles can firmly assert that "more is known in more detail about this prehistoric society than any other similar archaeological manifestation in the Southeast."

More so than we can possibly imagine today, in prehistoric times, rivers formed the foundation of an extensive trade network that twisted and wound its way throughout the landscape. Before the introduction of pack animals such as the horse, rivers were populated with canoes 40 feet in length transporting goods over great distances. Rivers were highways, and like the present, settlements sprang up around them. From the falls at Tuscaloosa to the swamps just north of Demopolis, Moundville rose to dominate affairs within a 50-mile swath of the Black Warrior River Valley. Perhaps as many as 10,000 people in surrounding satellite villages and farms paid tribute to the mound builders. For more than 100 miles, the Black Warrior and Cahaba Rivers flow in almost parallel lives, often less than 30 miles apart. Their numerous tributaries extend even closer together, like grasping fingers, coming so close they nearly touch. And just below Centreville along the Cahaba River, a single, lonely mound stands, a far-flung Moundville outpost, a reminder of just how extensive the rule of these people truly was.





# ILLE AND THE MISSISSIPPIANS

When the first Paleoindians entered North America across the Bering Land Bridge around 13,000 BC, extensive glaciers claimed huge portions of the world's water. Eventually, ocean levels dropped some 100 feet, making the land migration possible. When these "new" Americans reached present-day Alabama, the diverse geography of the region greatly influenced settlement patterns then as it continues to do so today. Soil content, different types of vegetation, and other physical elements of the landscape altered migration to the extent that physiography becomes history in a kind of geographical determinism: if at all possible, you live where living is the easiest.

Along the fertile, self-renewing landscape of the Black Warrior River, the southern floodplain forest provided the abundance of resources necessary to support large populations. The river valley became populated, and these early inhabitants possessed the basic materials necessary to develop a thriving culture. As the

climate warmed, a new environment emerged, forcing indigenous people to adapt. Tool construction advanced, as did the development of pottery, an increasing reliance on domesticated plants began, trade expanded, and maize was introduced. The bow and arrow were developed. By the beginning of the Mississippian Stage AD 1050, the hereditary chiefdoms emerged, introducing for the first time a class system that created a clear delineation between the elite and the rest of the community.

Indeed, it can be inferred that a fairly stratified society existed at Moundville solely from the fact that some 29 truncated or flat-topped mounds varying from three to 60 feet in height dot the Moundville plateau near the Black Warrior River. Unorganized societies do not construct mounds made up of four million cubic feet of earth. They do not build a mile-long palisade wall of timber 8-10 feet high interspersed with square defensive towers every 100 feet. They do not have the time or resources to highly refine the art of engraved pottery. A question then, naturally arises: why was the Black Warrior Valley the site of such advanced development? The Tombigbee Valley, the Alabama River Basin, and the Gunterville Basin area of the Tennessee Valley each possessed riverine populations greater than the Black Warrior Valley, yet

the Mound Builders chose a bluff some 55 feet above the Black Warrior River as their site of permanent occupation.

According to University of Alabama professor of anthropology Dr. Vernon J. Knight, there are at least two prime reasons for the mound builders' choice of the site.

"When the Black Warrior enters the Coastal Plain, the velocity becomes much slower and meandering. So you have this broad meandering belt starting in Tuscaloosa and extending down toward Demopolis. This is the widest and most fertile part of the Black Warrior Valley." In this area, the greatest number of people could be supported with the least amount of effort. But in a more specific sense, why did that particular Mississippian town become the center? "There are probably a couple of reasons," Knight continues. "One is that it is one of only two places where



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high bluffs directly abut the river. Flood-protected bluffs right on the river are rare on the Black Warrior. Everything else goes underwater sooner or later. But not Moundville. The other reason is the fact that it is centrally located to the rest of the chiefdom, and that makes it more efficient for tribute payment and so forth. It is simply easier to control."

**T**he first professional excavator of Moundville, Nathaniel T. Lupton, was a professor of chemistry, director of the munitions bureau for the Confederate States of America, and eventually President of the University of Alabama. His 1869 excavation some 15 miles south of Tuscaloosa, small by today's standards but considered extensive at the time, cost \$29.83. But the main reason he was sent to what was then called the "Carthage Mounds" by the Smithsonian Institution was to help settle the raging 19th century archaeological controversy of who built them. Many found it improbable that Native American societies could have build the thousands of mounds scattered throughout the Mississippi Valley, opting instead for the explanation that the ruins were the decaying remainder of an ancient race of "mound builders," civilized men somehow overcome by the natives.

Early in the 19th century, the newly-completed *Book of Mormon* elaborated the Church of Latter-day Saints' belief that emigrants from modern-day Israel twice crossed the Atlantic and settled in the new world and built the mounds. After fraternal warfare decimated the population, the theory goes, only the Indians remained, people who according to the *Book of Mormon*, can trace their descent from

the Israelite tribe of Joseph. Scholars, artists, and pseudoscientists at the time had similarly fantastic ideas concerning the "mound builder's" origins that today seem almost amusing: they were the survivors of Atlantis, errant Vikings, from North Africa, Danish, Welsh, Mexican, even aliens from outer space. Reason prevailed, eventually.

A major figure in early 20th century archaeology and the man who put Moundville on the map, Clarence B. Moore visited the site twice, once in 1905 and again in 1906. His extensive work uncovered numerous burials and beautiful artifacts that, when published with his accounts, caused quite a commotion in both the archaeological and popular imagination. His assistant, H. Newell Wardle wrote a companion article for *Harper's Magazine* which reached a large audience. "At that time, *Harper's* was like the *Time-Life* magazine of the nation," explains Knight. "People had never seen exotic Mississippian stuff like that before. Odds and ends had been found, but no one had seen a lot of it from one place in good context: here's where it's from, here's a lot of it, and here is an actual culture that goes with it, and it is local. This is not just some Aztec traders wandering up this way. There really is a local art system." Some items from Moundville such as the elaborate and beautiful rattlesnake disc were thought by experts to be fake, but the magnitude of Moore's excavations uncovered so many items it soon became clear that the relics were the genuine product of a highly sophisticated Native American civilization.

Moore's success at making the public aware of

Moundville's significance encouraged some looters and relic hunters to disturb the site, but a number of citizens organized and gradually the land was bought and preserved as a park in 1933. "It was probably only because of the preservation efforts in the 1920's that the Moundville site was protected and purchased by concerned local citizens," offers Paul Jones, Director of Moundville Archaeological Park. "They saved it from development and destruction." During the 1930's and 40's the Civilian Conservation Corps began an erosion control program that grew to encompass mound and lake restoration, as well as the construction of roads and buildings, including a museum. During this time, 500,000 square feet of the site was excavated by the Alabama Museum of Natural History under the direction of Walter B. Jones, and David, James, and Tom DeJarnette. Some 3,000 burials and 100 clay fire basins were located, 75 house patterns identified, and almost one million fragments of pottery vessels and numerous other artifacts were found. By Paul Jones's estimate, today there are some 40 tons of artifacts in the museum's repository.

**B**y the 1960's, Moundville scholars had inherited nearly a century of extensive fieldwork on the site. To date, only portions of this work have been systematically examined; however, the masses of material, notes, artifacts, and surveys are beginning to come together, and consequently, the last decade has seen numerous advances, refinement of data and downright revisions of long-held views on what life might have been like a millennium ago in west central Alabama. Much of this data is found in a new collection of essays,

*Studies in Moundville Archaeology*, edited by Vernon J. Knight and Vincas P. Steponaitis.





According to Knight and Steponaitis, prior to Moundville's first occupancy in AD 1050, Mississippians relied mainly on wild foods and were just beginning to use shell beads as a form of accrued wealth. After the site became inhabited, distinctive Mississippian traits began to manifest themselves: platform mounds emerged, as did shell tempered pottery in new shapes, an intensification of agriculture began in which corn, squash, chenopod, sunflower, and beans were cultivated. As the agricultural economy stabilized, the inhabitants received nearly 40% of their calories from corn alone. This had a great stabilizing affect on the population and in turn, the entire culture.

Construction began on all the major mounds and the palisade wall around the same time, between 1200 and 1250. Inside the wall, the central plaza's layout was designed and began to be filled with square wattle-and-daub houses. Structure was imposed, and organization became a key to development. As maize began to provide 65% of the calories in the diet, it became clear that the elite who occupied the mounds received foodstuffs and other tribute from commoners throughout the large region under Moundville's influence. "One interesting thing is that there was a Moundville-phase satellite center on the Cahaba just south of Centerville," says Knight. "It was a small, one-mound administrative center. You can see plenty of them along the Black Warrior. It was where a local chief lived and administered the district, collected tribute, and sent it up the line to the main center. It has never been excavated but just gathering pottery from the surface, it is clearly Moundville pottery. What this tells us is that perhaps at its height, the Moundville Chiefdom would have incorporated a segment of people who lived near the Cahaba." Peripheral mounds constructed in parts of the Black Warrior Valley point to the increasing centralization of the Moundville Chiefdom as a political and economic entity.

Local trade brought greenstone from Chilton County, sandstone from Tuscaloosa, and chert from the Florence area, but a much broader scale of acquisition is evident. Elite craftsmen used copper and mica from the southern Appalachians, marine shell or whelks from the Gulf Coast and Florida, as well as galena, a shiny, silver lead-like material found in Missouri along the upper Mississippi Valley. Their craftsmanship of pottery, embossed copper, and stonework is exceptional. "A lot of people don't realize what an important role Moundville played in Southeastern prehistory and American prehistory," offers Paul Jones. "The site here probably influenced Native Americans all through the Southeast with its pottery, ichnography, and extensive trade connections."

As the Moundville complex consolidated its power and prestige, one need look no further than the mounds themselves to see the foremost symbol of the culture's eminence. Imagine the scene: you are a resident of one of the many outlying farmsteads on your way to the political center of the region. It will be your first visit to Moundville. You have never seen anything manmade larger than the small, squat wattle-and-dabble home you share with your family. As your canoe reaches the high bluff along the river's edge, you know you have arrived. Climbing the hill, you see before you the largest single collection of humanity you will ever see. Numerous huts are crammed inside the huge enclosure. Nearly 1,000 people live here, a far cry from the few farms near your home up river. Before you are great, manmade mountains of earth, a few are used as burial mounds while the majority are home to the elite families that rule the region and whose extensive power has brought you here. Your trip may be to bring tribute in the form of corn, raw materials, or some other sign of wealth to these very people living high above the plain. It is beyond imagination. A high wooden wall extends in an arch off in the distance, gently enclosing the nearly 200-acre

settlement. You know that some back home will think you are exaggerating and never believe your descriptions of the place. Perhaps your mother even warned you of the dangers of the "big city." It is overwhelming.

As symbols of power, the mounds are essentially monuments to those that inhabited them, to those that possessed the political will and means to ensure they were continually rebuilt, roughly every 24 years. They represent political centers of prestige associated with the elite. Goods were delivered to the mounds and then redistributed, making them economic centers vital to the enhancement of that power. Some may have been used as council houses, public centers, and a few show no sign of buildings whatsoever. So many mysteries remain, the foremost being why after 1300 the largest settlement north of Mexico ceased to rebuild its palisade wall and was gradually uninhabited save by the elite. As Knight and Steponaitis suggest in *Studies in Moundville Archaeology*, "almost as rapidly as Moundville had become a 'town,' it ceased to be one, leaving, we propose, only the elite and their retainers as permanent residents." The two researchers offer several possibilities for the exodus: soil depletion, a choice made by the elite to further sanctify the center by having the commoners depart, a lessened threat of attack, or a combination of these elements. Either way, Moundville the town evolved into Moundville the mortuary.

In its earlier history, the number of burials within the center were relatively low. But after 1300 this figure changed dramatically. Cemeteries took the place of what until recently were residential areas. The majority of those buried in Moundville did not even live there. Many mounds had been abandoned by 1400 though some were still inhabited and actively rebuilt and enlarged. As it was a few centuries before, most people in the region again lived in outlying farmsteads.

After 1450, the first villages since pre-Moundville times began to emerge, and outlying mound centers away from Moundville continued to rise. But by the middle of the 16th century, even these settlements were abandoned. By the end of the century, all mounds in Moundville were abandoned as well. Mississippian organization disappeared from the landscape and with it the inhabitants' reliance on corn and other cultivated crops. Disease and malnutrition are evident in human skeletal remains from this time at a much higher rate than during Moundville's earlier stages as diets now relied on procuring relatively unstable wild foodstuff and game. And, in what is almost endemic to Mississippian populations, large-scale conflict probably added to the depopulation. As to the matter of the entrada, by the time Hernando De Soto's expedition passed near Moundville in 1540, the culture's decline was well underway, though some scholars suggest a smaller, but still somewhat unified chiefdom inhabited Moundville at the time of De Soto. If De Soto ever saw or heard of the mounds, there is no mention of them in the Spaniards' journals kept during the journey through the Southeast.

What we are left with today, is in park director Paul Jones' words, "the best preserved Mississippian society in America, without peer." Designated as a National Historic Landmark and listed as eligible for World Heritage Status just a few years ago, the park is currently planning renovations and improvements that, by reaching World Heritage Status, would put it in a very elite group along with the Pyramids at Giza and other renowned ancient monuments. It is all the more appropriate since in some ways, Moundville is to this region's history what the pyramids are to those living along the Nile. Like ancient Egypt, it is a river that made such a culture possible, that provided food, that brought seasonal floods to fertilize the soil, and the currents for the traffic of goods and people that bound the political entity together. But unlike Egypt and many of the world's historical treasures, what by AD 1300 amounted to a veritable Native American empire stretching 50 miles up and down the Black Warrior River and encompassing 10,000 people, today we do not even know the name of this culture's capital city other than the one we gave a complex of mounds early in the twentieth century: Moundville.



Photos of Moundville Archaeological Park by Beth Maynor Young.





Hernando De Soto



1584 Spanish map by A. Ortelius - Courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives.

## ANOTHER WAY OF LIFE *Native Americans and the Cahaba River Valley*

Oka Uba  
Caba  
Kaapa

### Cau-hau-ba and Kahawba

are but a few names emerging at the whim of language, the spellings following the dictates of the European ear. Depending if the explorer hailed from Spain, France, Britain, or America, it has been recorded many different ways. All seem to be corruptions of the Choctaw Ika Uba meaning "waters above," which may imply waters from the sky, waters from a mountain spring, or perhaps waters that are a gift from above—we will never know exactly. But to this day, pieces of a prior life still force their way into the surface along the banks of the Cahaba, reminding those who listen of Alabama's not-so-distant past. An arrowhead revealed in sand, remnants of pottery among gravel—history has a way of resurfacing and bearing the bits and fragments of a past life into the present.

Of the earliest inhabitants of the Cahaba River Valley, little is known. Before Hernando De Soto's destructive march from Florida to Texas, 1539-1543, Mississippian Indian culture was waning, though to the north, signs of the culture's decline were long evident. Near St. Louis in present-day Illinois, the crumbling ruins of Cahokia, the greatest Native American metropolis north of Mexico, marked the capital of Mississippian society during its peak some three hundred years before Columbus's voyage. A highly refined hierarchical social structure and economic organization existed along the riverine habitat ages before the first Europeans landed on the continent.

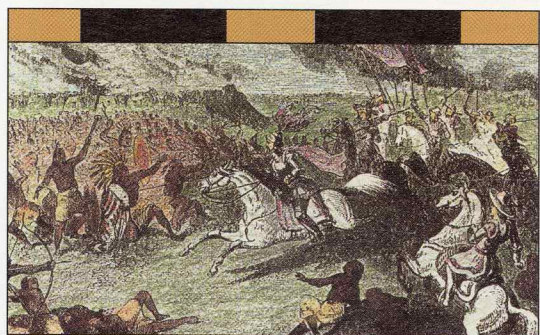
The Southeast's environment suited permanent habitation far better than northerly woodland regions. Caught in the time-consuming cycle of laboriously clearing land only to quickly exhaust the soil's productivity, such farming people were soon forced to relocate to a new, more fertile site and start the cycle again. Mississippian culture was, by definition, built upon an ever-renewing environment. When the river's high waters receded each spring, fresh, fertile soil was deposited on the floodplains. Alluvial soil was easily worked and yielded a surplus of vegetable proteins that offset seasonal scarcities of meat, allowing the mound builders a stable foundation that would support large communities.

By the time Mississippian culture at Moundville was in decline, warfare, malnutrition, and the disintegration of the political

force holding the society together caused a massive population shift in the region. It remains unknown where the mound builders went and what people took their place. "It is so obscure what happened to Moundville and its surrounding inhabitants that there is no way to connect them to any particular group of modern Native Americans," explains anthropology professor Vernon Knight of the University of Alabama. "There is a little hint that they may have spoken a language related to Choctaw and Chickasaw from the De Soto accounts, but that is not certain and since the Black Warrior was abandoned before the English and French got here, it makes it very difficult to make those links. Despite the fact that we have tried hard to do it, it is still all speculation." Part of the difficulty lies in the sudden and expansive changes that occurred during and after Moundville society disintegrated. "When the depopulation hit," Knight continues, "it hit so hard, the entire valley was abandoned in the 17th century, and the remnants of Moundville fled elsewhere, primarily—and just on archaeological evidence—it appears that they fled to the Alabama River, some even to the Cahaba River. But bringing that up into the historical record and linking it with historically named people has been impossible."

Along the Cahaba valley, the rich soil supported natural stands of nut and fruit-bearing trees along with wild seed-bearing plants which in turn attracted deer, raccoon, wild turkey, and a variety of game throughout the grasslands and forests lining the river. With the natural rising and falling of the river, surrounding marsh areas along the lower Cahaba emerged, attracting great numbers of waterfowl. As the river meandered along its course, oxbow lakes developed beside old channels cut off by the changing path of the river. Numerous aquatic plants found new habitats in which to thrive, further contributing to the diversity of life in and along the river. The Cahaba was the heart and soul of what amounted to a perfect ecosystem: a self-sustaining, renewable paradise for the Mississippians living there.

De Soto's march throughout the South was like no other event in the Mississippians' history. With 600 well-armed soldiers, assorted slaves and servants, 24 priests to convert the natives, 220 horses, many pigs and mules, as well as bloodhounds to hunt and run down Indians, the force amounted to a small army. Moving through nearly every southern state, the Spaniards depended upon stealing food from villages they passed just to survive. After arriving in present-day Alabama, the army reached the town of Atahachi, stronghold of chief Tascaluza, probably at the junction of the Tallapoosa and Coosa rivers.



### The Battle of Mabila

Following the Alabama River, De Soto and a practically hostage Tascaluza made their way to the town of Mabila where De Soto thought supplies and perhaps gold awaited them. In actuality, Tascaluza had arranged a welcoming party to repel the Spanish invaders, and the ensuing battle was the bloodiest on American soil until Shiloh 332 years later. Garciaso de la Vega's *La Florida*, the most detailed record of De Soto's journey, claims "the number of Indians, men and women, who perished in this conflict by the sword and by fire was thought to exceed eleven thousand persons," doubtless an exaggeration from the same source that phrases Tascaluza's actions as "treason" and "responsible for all this calamity." Regardless, it was a slaughter. Eighty-two Spaniards and possibly as many as 4,000 to 5,000 Indians died in the battle, a decisive turn for a battered expedition, a decisive end for native culture.

Though the location of Mabila is not known—early historians tended to place it in Clarke County though recently a group of scholars suggested Dallas County where the Cahaba joins the Alabama—the mystery remains a source of contention. "It is absolutely the god-honest truth that there is no one place in Alabama people can go to and say 'De Soto was here,'" contends Linda Derry of the Alabama Historical Commission. "There was a huge Indian village under Cahawba that seemed to disappear around 1540. Its name continues to be unknown but its disappearance is confirmed. Until we can solve such mysteries, armchair historians will have their way, but one small find and just like that, the pieces would fall together."





Maize

Numerous mound communities were deserted before De Soto's march, presumably from earlier visits by Europeans spreading diseases such as smallpox and measles for which Indians had no resistance. Whole communities were destroyed, and those left, if not slaughtered or enslaved, would soon feel the effects of the Spaniards. Some estimate as many as 80% of the villages were devastated by disease, the single greatest loss of life on this continent, a silent American holocaust. Such losses effectively crippled all Mississippian political organization, hastening the decline so that by the influx of Europeans arriving more than a century later, the native culture was greatly different than what had existed before. Unfortunately, this period remains largely undocumented, and details of the Mississippian demise are buried in time. What we have to thank De Soto for is written records of the vibrant culture he almost single-handedly destroyed.

By the late 1600's, many Indian tribes had recovered somewhat from the ravages of the epidemics. Order was restored though decline was again eminent after British traders from Charleston and French from Mobile made vast inroads in native society trading rum, cloth, metal goods, guns, and ammunition for deerskin and Indian slave labor. The Muskogean or Creek confederation of tribes emerged as a check to rising colonial threats. With the construction of Fort Toulouse in 1717, also known as Fort des Alibamons, at the strategic fork of the Coosa and Tallapoosa, the French let it be known they intended to be a force on the rivers. But their influence was short-lived, and by the 1740's British traders had penetrated beyond Toulouse's fortifications establishing outposts on the Cahaba River, building warehouses in the void upriver from France's grasp. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 made Britain's ascent in the region official, and France lost the Alabama River all the way down to Mobile Bay.

At this time, the Cahaba River served as the Choctaw's eastern border with the Creeks. Excellent farmers and traders, the Choctaw language was the basis of a trade language, the Mobilian trade jargon, used throughout the South by both Indian and European. It is interesting to note that Choctaws in the Cahaba and other river basins hunted beaver at a sustainable level for generations before the European fur trade began to thrive with the introduction of new trapping techniques. By the late 1700's, beaver populations crashed from over trapping, and an unexpected environmental consequence occurred. Numerous small beaver dams along smaller streams and tributaries of the Cahaba

were now abandoned and soon collapsed. Before, the dams held back the first rush of rainfall and decreased the severity of flooding in the streams and river. But once gone, soil erosion rates increased, stream channels and banks lost stability, and the faster runoff meant less water could penetrate into the groundwater reserves. Consequently the severity of droughts increased. Compared with present-day threats such damage may have been minor; however, a significant loss of backwater habitat most likely affected aquatic species inhabiting such ecosystems.

In 1732, d'Anville's map of the region was the first to include the Cahaba. In the 1750's, English trade commissioners briefly considered the strategic import of building a blockhouse on the river for secure trade with the Choctaws, at that time French allies. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 made this unnecessary as the French lost their claim. All the while Indians had played the French against British, British against French, and increasingly, the Europeans were able to do the same to the Indians. John Stuart, a superintendent for Britain's Southern Indian Department, managed to ease the Choctaw-Creek feuding for a time, but the American colonies' dispute with Britain would end this brief interlude for good.

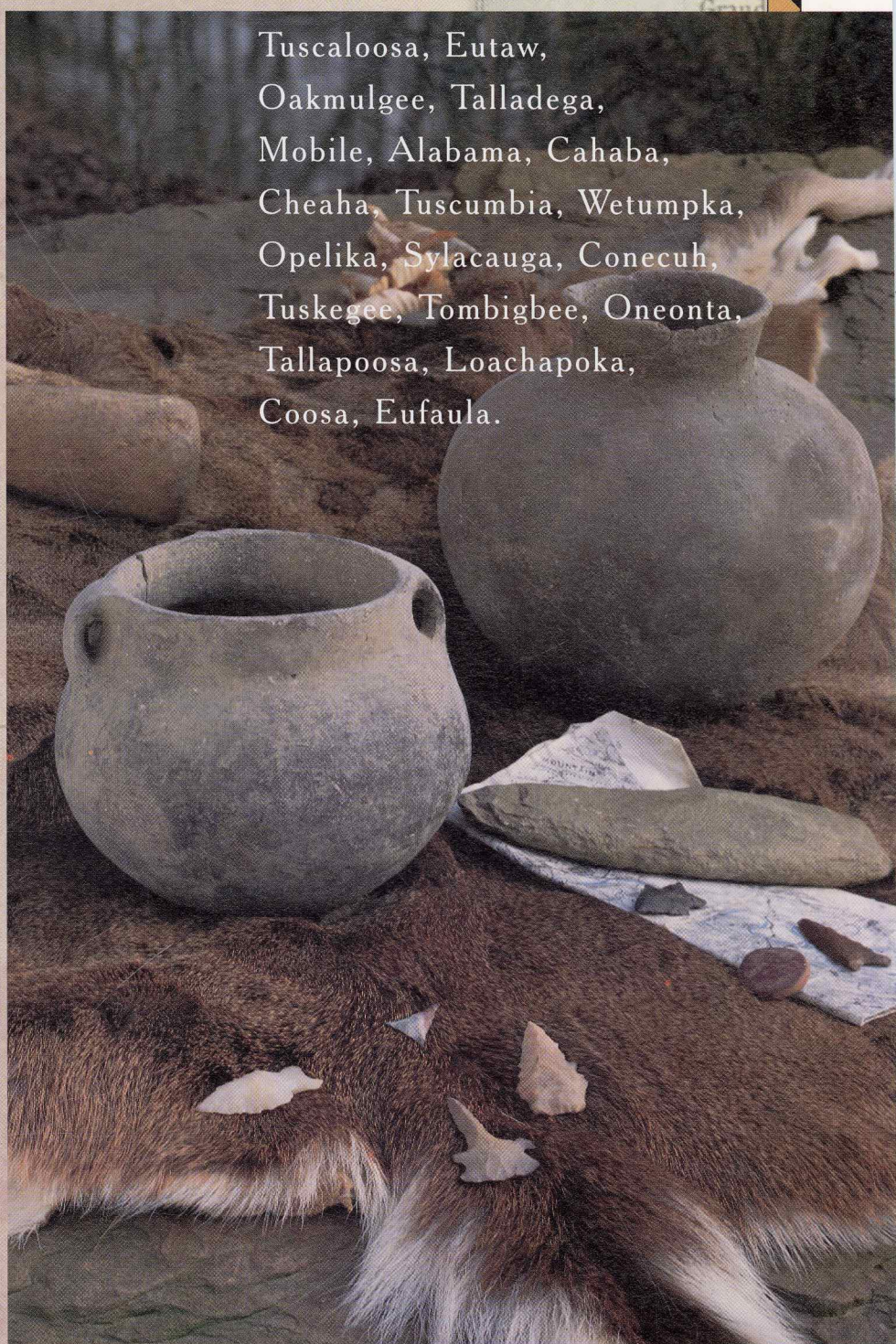
Sullen, dispossessed Spain joined the effort against Britain and secured Mobile in 1780, effectively controlling river traffic up the Alabama and Cahaba until ceding the area in 1795 to the young United States. As more settlers entered the region, in an all too familiar pattern the Choctaws that sided with the colonists against Britain gradually were squeezed off their traditional lands or assimilated until their eventual removal in 1816, 1820, and 1830 with a series of treaties. The Creek nation the Choctaws had fought for so long would not go so easily, and between August 1813 and March 1814, the Creek War, an extension of the War of 1812 between Britain and the United States, raged to decide whose land the Alabama country belonged to—Indian or American.

Divisions within the Creek Nation had for some time led to a separation of Lower Creeks, which leaned towards the Americanization of their culture through assimilation with neighboring white settlements, and the more traditional Upper Creeks which, by 1805, had firmly resisted intrusions into their territory. A federal road bisecting Creek land was a further sticking point, and from it emerged the more violent faction, the "Red Sticks," who sought to restore Creek tradition. When Tecumseh, the Shawnee chief, arrived in Choctaw territory in the fall of 1811 spreading his message of Pan-Indian brotherhood, the Choctaws, primarily agriculturalists already adjusted to American ways, viewed his mystical nationalism with suspicion; however, many Upper Creeks responded enthusiastically to his call. By the

time of the Creek uprising in 1813, Tecumseh was dead and his dream of uniting the Indians against the Americans ended with the death of nearly 1,000 Creeks at General Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

At the Treaty of Fort Jackson, formerly known as Toulouse, the Creeks lost half their lands and the Choctaw allies of General Jackson fared little better, losing huge tracts with the sweep of Jackson's pen. Within the life span of one generation, a vast human tide of refugees would be mercilessly swept out of the land they had known for countless years and into the western territories. The few Indians that remained adapted in varying degrees to an alien culture though they were largely pushed to the hinterlands, to the extreme margins of existence. Like exposed shards of pottery found on a sandbar after a heavy rain, the relics of Choctaw, Creek, and other Indian cultures surface from time to time, still shaping the present, though seldom in noticed or recognizable form. The native way of life that had endured for so long beside the banks of the Cahaba was no more. In its place, a new, swiftly growing economic and social organization took firm root in the Mississippi Territory that would, within a few short years, be christened "the State of Alabama," an old name spoken in a foreign tongue. But even so, we still sound their language every day of our lives:

Tuscaloosa, Eutaw,  
Oakmulgee, Talladega,  
Mobile, Alabama, Cahaba,  
Cheaha, Tuscumbia, Wetumpka,  
Opelika, Sylacauga, Conecuh,  
Tuskegee, Tombigbee, Oneonta,  
Tallapoosa, Loachapoka,  
Coosa, Eufaula.



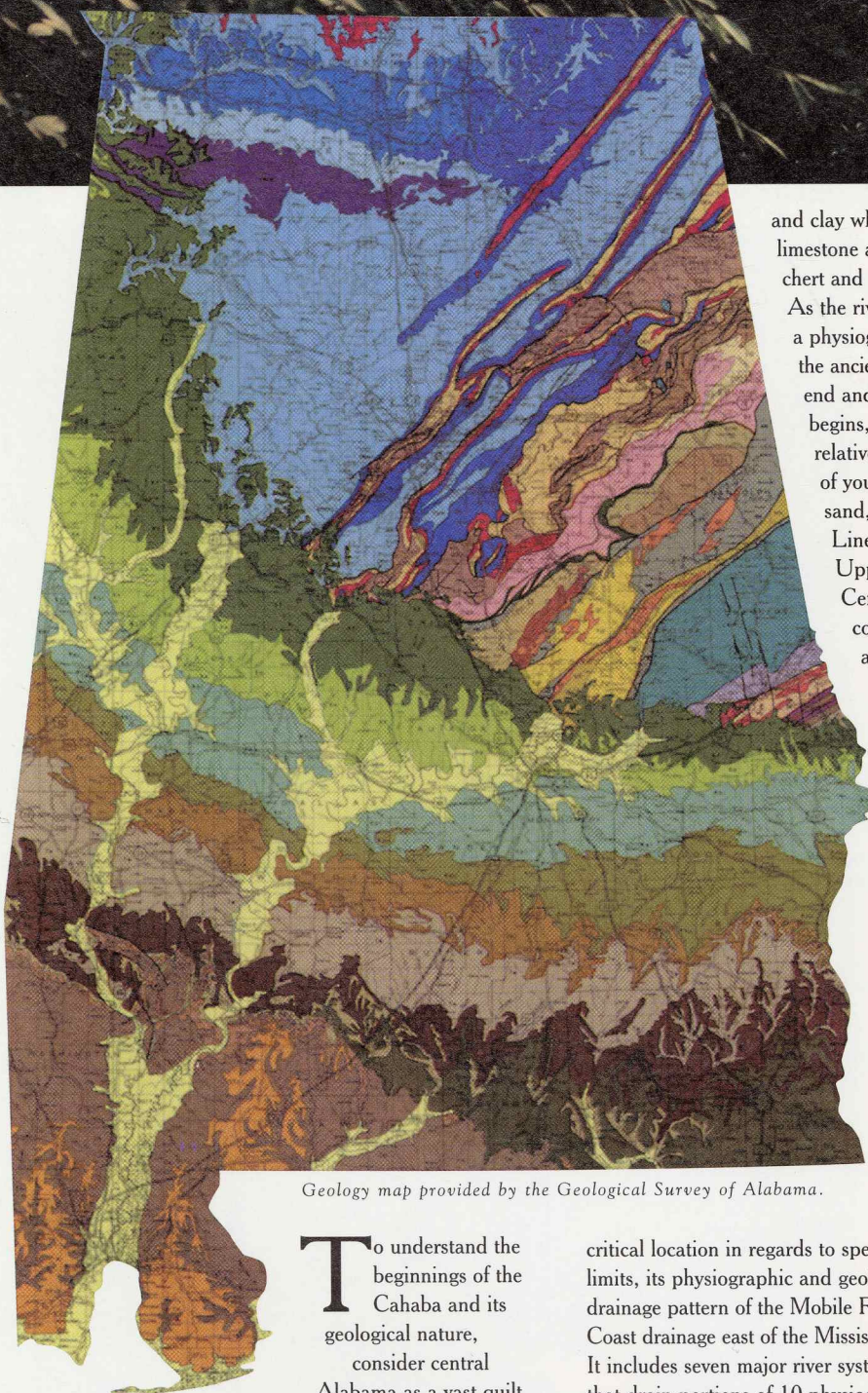
Native American Artifacts beside Cahaba River

1732 French map by Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville - courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives



# Alabama's Unique Geology

## A Foundation for Diversity



Geology map provided by the Geological Survey of Alabama.

To understand the beginnings of the Cahaba and its geological nature, consider central Alabama as a vast quilt spread out upon the land. If you could place your hands at the sides of the quilt and push the cloth together, it would result in a series of wrinkles resembling how the valleys and ridges of the Appalachians were formed when colliding tectonic plates created our environmental inheritance in the Paleozoic era. Mountains rose and fell, dispersing a series of parallel ridges and valleys in a southwest to northeast array that so distinctively mark the north Alabama region. Set between the Cumberland Plateau to the northwest and the Piedmont to the southeast, the Valley and Ridge region was formed when the African plate collided with the North American plate during the Paleozoic era.

It is here in the Valley and Ridge the Cahaba begins, twisting and being turned as it forces its way along rock formations in a path roughly parallel to the adjacent ridges a few miles to the northwest. The Cahaba Valley soils and the uplands surrounding it are made up of gravelly loams

and clay while the rocks are mostly limestone and shale in the valleys, chert and sandstone along the ridges. As the river crosses the "Fall Line" a physiographic demarcation where the ancient Appalachian Mountains end and the Gulf Coastal Plain begins, the Cahaba flows through relatively flat terrain consisting of younger, Cenozoic-age gravel, sand, and clay. In these Fall Line Hills, often called the Upper Coastal Plain or the Central Pine Belt, the river's course starts to meander about, cutting through the soft soil of clay and sand. The Cahaba's last few miles run through the Black Belt, a land of pasture and agriculture dependent upon the predominance of heavy calcareous soils.

Looking beyond the Cahaba River Valley, the diversity of plant and animal life in Alabama is rivaled by few if any areas of comparable size in the United States. Called "America's monster of biological diversity" in a recent issue of *Nature Conservancy*, Alabama's

critical location in regards to species and subspecies range limits, its physiographic and geologic diversity, and the drainage pattern of the Mobile River Basin, the largest Gulf Coast drainage east of the Mississippi River, earn it the title. It includes seven major river systems, including the Cahaba, that drain portions of 10 physiographic provinces and four states. The varying soils, topography, geology, and other physical features in each province provide unique chemical and physical characteristics to the waters that flow through them, providing a tremendous variety of habitats for flora and fauna.

During the Pleistocene glaciation or Ice Age, the region was a refuge for species unable to survive further north, a tremendous biotic reserve that saved many plant and animal communities from extinction. Today, many of those plants and animals exist nowhere else in the world. Alabama waterways can claim half of all turtle species found in North America and 6 out of 10 mussel species of freshwater mussel. Recently three new fish species and eight undescribed wildflowers were discovered. All these factors contribute to make Alabama one of the most biologically diverse states in America. Combine this with an extensive river system that nourishes agriculture and transportation, and Alabama has a natural environment perhaps

unparalleled by any other state. Paul Hartfield, an endangered species biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services contends that "Alabama to me is the biggest biodiversity story of North America today. This is the 20th century environmental story."

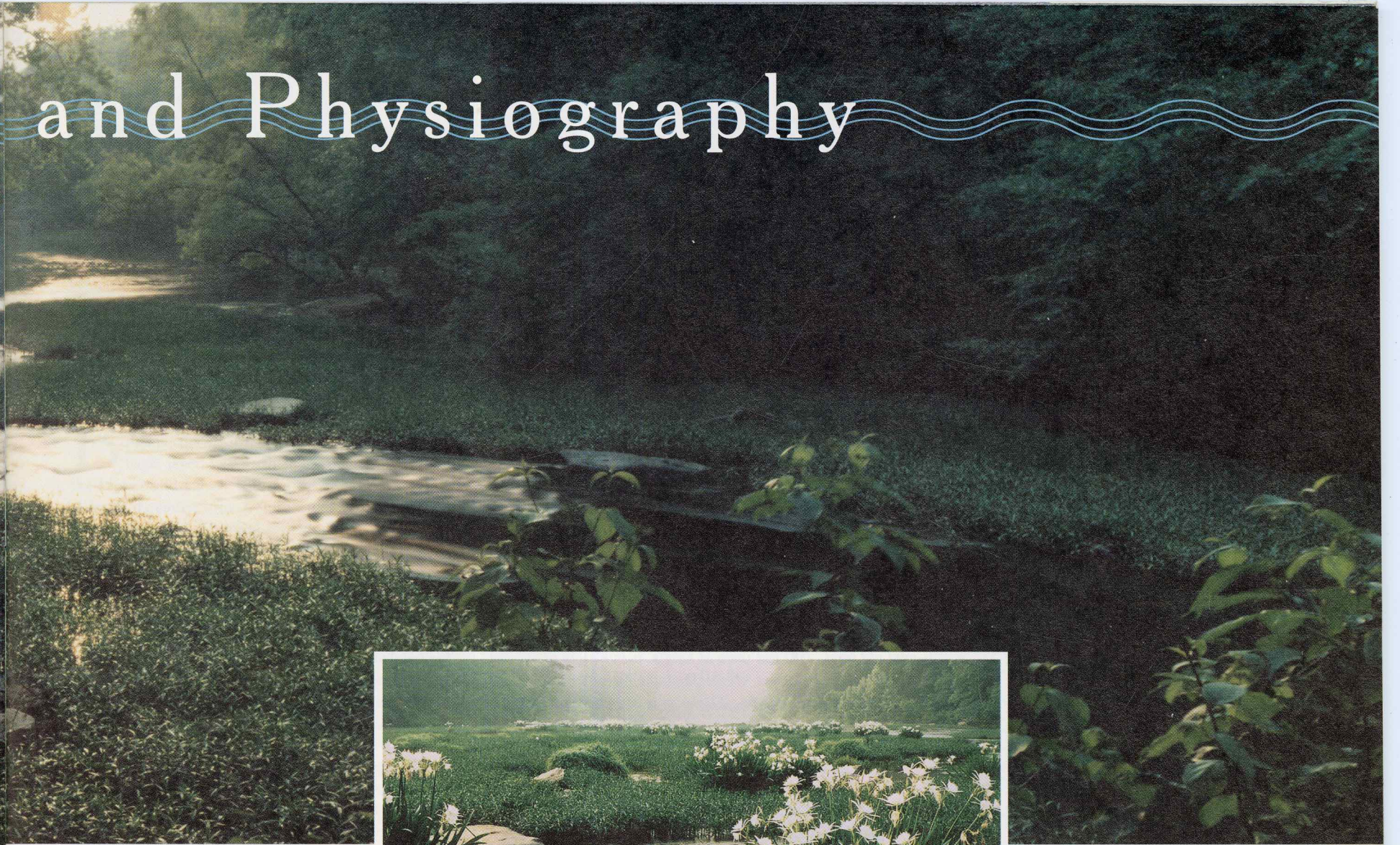
However, the ecosystem straining to tell that remarkable story is hardly stable. In the Mobile River Basin, the increasing pressures man has brought to bear on his environment are taking a toll. While Alabama can claim one of the nation's most vibrant and diverse ecosystems, it also possesses a biotic extinction rate unmatched in the continental United States. More than 22% of Alabama's native aquatic animal species are at risk of becoming extinct. This remains the nation's highest percentage. Sixty-nine animal species face extinction. Nearly 50% of all extinctions in the continental U.S. since European settlement have occurred during the 20th century in the Mobile River Basin. Of the 3,800 plant and animal species remaining, one in four are in danger of extinction. The causes are complex, but suffice it to say that in the basin, habitat modification is the primary cause.

Besides influencing delicate ecosystems, Alabama's diverse geology and physiology have long had a profound affect on man's settlement in the region. Paleoindian and other prehistoric people found the climate well-suited to their needs, and as the temperatures warmed first during the early Holocene (ca. 8000 BC) and then again during the Middle Archaic Period (6000-4000 BC), warmer and drier seasons created a more stable environment and larger food sources. Approaching historic times, the distinct and complex histories of Indian tribes such as the Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and the Creek are among the richest in the nation, and suitably enough, most villages and towns are located along the many rivers coursing through the region.

As the first Europeans and other immigrants arrived in the area that would become Alabama, they found rich agricultural regions, plentiful game, vast expanses of timber, a diverse mineral wealth including iron ore, limestone, and coal, all found in close proximity like nowhere else in the world. Just as earlier migrations of people followed natural settlement patterns, these pioneers built homes and farms near rivers and streams, plowed the rich bottom land, and established trades and businesses as more people arrived. Today, these patterns seem far removed from our ordinary experiences, and the varied geographical and physiographical regions found in Alabama often mean less to us than what road we take to work or what neighborhood is safe and has good schools.

But the rich environmental inheritance that brought the first settlers rushing into the Alabama Territory of the past is largely the heritage we still share today. The natural treasures Alabama has been endowed with, the great diversity of plant and animal life found here, is truly a proud legacy to be handed down intact generation to generation. Like a patchwork quilt, the different people, flora and fauna, and geographic sections are pieced together, the fabric combining to make a greater, more complete whole for all involved—past, present, and future.









# Springs Become River

Just southwest of Springville, with trickle-flow of water from several springs on 1,500-foot Cahaba Mountain, the Cahaba River emerges in tiny rivulets from the earth. It pushes upwards and out of the mountain, defying gravity if only for a moment, until it slows, converges, and flows over moss-covered rocks to form a small stream of water bound ever downward. Like a magnet, the streams are pulled to paths dictated by the valleys and begin to grow. After passing Trussville, the river begins to speed and swell, fed by tributaries such as Little Cahaba Creek, Big Black Creek, and others until it is a young, potent amalgamation, the sum of many parts rather than the offspring of one true source. By the time the river ends near Selma, the Cahaba is a wise old man, 200 feet wide at points, meandering about until its dissipation and final joining with the Alabama River. Perhaps like no other river in Alabama, the Cahaba is a participation of waters, a colossal gathering of energy. We tend to think of rivers as we often imagine ourselves, a single entity, isolated, self-sufficient, whole, rather than a series of processes and motions. Doing so is like envisioning a vein or artery as an independent vessel, isolated and going about its work alone, solitary, when in fact, it is utterly dependent upon its tributaries and what they bring to the greater whole the one tissue serves. Without the smallest of veins, there exists no heart.



Calamite fossil

*"And a river went out of Eden to water the garden."*

Genesis 2:10

The Cahaba River watershed, an immense 1,870 square miles of interconnecting springs, creeks, and

smaller rivers feeding into the Cahaba River, covers portions of Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby, Bibb, Tuscaloosa, Chilton, Perry, and Dallas counties. It is the physical heart of Alabama. Through this area, a river has carved its way through the rough foothills of the Appalachian Mountains to the soft alluvial soil of the Gulf Coastal Plains over countless eons. The great diversity of the river's fauna



Black-knobbed Sawback

and flora exists thanks to the 190-mile geological sweep of the terrain through which the Cahaba makes its way. The river, in

its structure, formation, and abundance, seems almost tailor-made for mankind, a garden awaiting a gardener to protect and tend. The Cahaba is still waiting.

For most of Alabama, the environmental impact of the last Ice Age was limited to cooler, drier summers as well as more severe winters than today. Consequently, biodiversity in this area was largely unaffected by the dramatic geological upheaval glaciers caused, allowing for long periods of development otherwise impossible in more northern climes. The ecological "payoff" has been huge for the plant and animal communities of the Cahaba, and consequently, for those people living in the region.

The Cahaba River contains a greater number of fish species per mile than any other river in North America. Of the 131 fish species found in the Cahaba, 18 are found nowhere else except the Mobile River drainage area. The Cahaba shiner, living only in the river whose name it carries, once had a range of 60 miles—now its range has been cut to 15, presumably by water quality problems from urbanization in the Birmingham area. Recently seven plant species previously unknown to science were found in Bibb County in a unique glade habitat. In years past, 118 different snail species were found in the Mobile River basin, making it the richest, most diverse



Withdrawing nectar

collection of snails in the world. After the Coosa River lost half of its snail species when hydroelectric dams were constructed, the Cahaba became host to the most diverse body of snail species in the entire Mobile basin. Unfortunately, at the last survey, eight species which had historically been collected in the Cahaba could not be located, and a decline in 24 other snail species was noted. Historically, 42 species of mussels existed in the Cahaba, more than found in the whole of Europe. Today, biologists have only been able to locate 27. Thirty-two plants found along the river are on the endangered or threatened species list. These are just the ones we know.

## CHARLES GRIFFIN, King of the River Redhorse

It is difficult to imagine a more perfect father-son ritual than the sport of fishing. Like most traditions and skills passed down from generation to generation, the art of fishing survives to be taught to eager youngsters worldwide because of the relative simplicity of tools, technique, and the nearly identical nature of getting a fish from water to land—there are only so many ways you can get a fish on a line. Imagining the scene is easy: "ok, son, drop your line out there where you know he'll be. Easy now, don't spook him. There he is. Now lift up on the pole until you've lassooed the fish, and then lift him out of the water and on to land. Good job!"

Yes, lassooed the fish, though in the case of Charles Griffin, it is not your ordinary trout, bass, or crappie he is lassooing. It is the River Redhorse, *Moxostoma carinatum*, and adults measure from 12 to 28 inches, including a small, downturned sucker that makes the Redhorse next to impossible to catch with a hook. Every April, when the water temperatures reach 71° to 76° F in the Cahaba River, the Redhorse returns in great numbers to spawn in shallow beds in the river. It is a four to five day feast of fish. With a fairly wide distribution in Alabama, the species' stronghold remains the Cahaba. And after years of decline, the Redhorse may be making a slight comeback according to Griffin, who lives near Beaver Dam Creek, a tributary of the Cahaba. He ought to know. His family has lived in Helena on the same land since before Alabama was a state.

"My great-great-grandfather came with Andrew Jackson in 1812's Indian wars, fell in love with this part of the country, and decided to settle here," Griffin begins. "Part of his mustering out pay was a parcel of land, 1,000 acres, that he just staked out. He was 16 at the time." Today, Charles Griffin and his wife Barbara live on part of that original Griffin homestead carved out some 170 years ago, and while Griffin may not farm the land like his ancestor, at least one important tradition has been handed down for several generations.

"At our spot on the river, there are fish traps



where my great-great-grandfather settled," Griffin explains, "and I don't doubt he didn't take these fish traps over from the Indians, because they were the ones that had them all initially. He also probably learned his fishing from the Indians. From then on, it has been passed down from father to son." The process seems deceptively simple. At the narrow end

of a long pole or fiberglass rod, a 22-gauge wire is tied in a loop resembling a small lasso with lead weights. After locating the spawning bed, you simply dangle the snare in the bed and wait for the fish to essentially lasso himself.

In the not-so-distant past, families in the area would drop their work every spring when the Redhorse returned. Nearly everyone knew how to snare the fish, but today it is only the Griffins who answer that age-old call. But even though Griffin has worked hard to ensure both his children and grandchildren continue the family tradition, that practice has been affected by sources beyond his control. "There's getting to be fewer and fewer Redhorse, I think because of the pollution in the last 10 to 12 years," Griffin says. "When I was a kid, I'd play hooky from school and go to Buck Creek in Helena, and you could catch Redhorse right there under the bridge. Then as the years went by, they dropped further and further down until they reached the Cahaba River. A few years later, we had to drive all the way down into Bibb County to find water that was clean enough and pure enough to catch Redhorse."

Today, Charles Griffin no longer catches the Redhorse for eating. "My mother cooked the last one I ate 20 or 25 years ago," he says with a laugh. After noticing their precipitous decline, he just snares and releases the Redhorse, preferring the thrill of potentially catching the same fish next year or the year after. "We realized we were catching too many and only hurting ourselves," he says. After some 50 consecutive years of snaring Redhorse, Charles Griffin is able to take a somewhat philosophical attitude to the importance of a tradition far older than himself. And when it comes to teaching people how you might go about lassooing a fish, he will probably tell you he has more fun watching someone learn than doing it himself. "You can just sit back and watch the process," he says, clearly daydreaming about the arrival of April, "and just see how nature runs."



Shark's tooth fossil





Limestone outcropping

## The Upper Cahaba

Beginning on a mountain and ending in the plains, the river travels through, at the most basic level, two distinct physical regions: the Upper and Lower Cahaba. The first 100 odd miles of its course—passing through Trussville, Leeds, Irondale, Birmingham, Mountain Brook, Helena, West Blocton and finally Centreville—is the most mountainous, full of steep banks, high bluffs and rocky shoals. Here the Upper Cahaba is marked by geological violence; millennia of colliding rock formations, compressing and breaking the earth, have formed many geological zones through which the river must pass. Limestone, sandstone, shale and coal are the bed in which the Cahaba rests as it cuts along its relatively steep grade. In the flatter terrain, willow, birch, sycamore, oak, poplar, hickory, maple, and ash number among the many varieties of tree species. On the rockier areas, pines dominate the landscape.

Today, a semi-evergreen shrub with a limited range, the Alabama Croton or *Croton alabamensis*, exists mainly on the many limestone bluffs along the Cahaba and in scattered sections along the Black Warrior River. Attractive and cultivated for its ornamental beauty in some locations, the croton dominates the woodland where it is found, turning a bright orange and yellow in autumn.

Probably the best-known of the Cahaba's imperiled species, the beautiful Cahaba (or Shoals)



Cahaba Lily habitat

Lily, was not originally isolated within the Cahaba system. Years ago the Lily prospered throughout the Southeast wherever clear water flowed over layered rock forming crevices needed for the seed and bulb to root fast and grow in moving waters. Not anymore. Today, the Cahaba River is one of the few significant habitats. Starting at Hargrove Shoals each May and June, not far from the town of West Blocton, a yearly spectacle occurs. Patches of two dozen green stalks jut out of the water two or more feet high. Several flower buds burst open



Cahaba Lily

on each stalk, waiting patiently for the lily's main pollinator, the hawk moth, to drift from lily to lily at night. The lilies come to life in brilliant white color. Though it has now ended in many other rivers because of habitat destruction from water quality problems and sediment smothering the lily's roots, many people make the pilgrimage to the Cahaba simply to view one of the finest remaining colonies of Cahaba Lilies in the world, a view that like many other components of the Cahaba system, is increasingly endangered.



Coastal Plain section

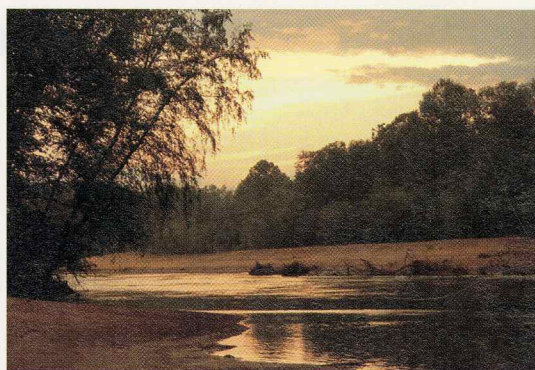
## The Lower Cahaba

Below Centreville, a dramatic and fascinating transition takes place, leaving the many distinctive traits and species of the Upper Cahaba behind, creating a new geological character entirely. The river slows, widens, and deepens. Sandbars take the place of rocky shoals. Pastures line the river, sharing space with the thick woodlands. Baldcypress, eastern redcedar, and Spanish moss-draped willows become more common. The water temperature warms ever so slightly and consequently, the quick-eyed may sight one of the many alligators or alligator snapping turtles seeking out sun to warm their cold blood. The Lower Cahaba begins at the Fall Line, a physiographic separation where the Appalachian Mountains end



Alligator

and the Coastal Plain begins. It is almost a different river, the Cahaba's alter-ego. No longer intent on forcing its way, the brash, impetuous river



Sunset on the river

ripens, giving way to its mature, patient nature as it meanders along.

As the Appalachians slowly eroded, the material deposited built up layers of sand, clay, and gravel sediment-soft and easily penetrated, a warm knife passing through butter. Since the elevation drops so slowly compared to the Upper Cahaba, tributaries can wind about lazily, creating small lakes along the river's edge over hundreds even thousands of years, many of which develop into Cypress



Ferns on Selma Chalk

Swamps. Called oxbow lakes, they form when the river meanders in sweeping curves so extensive that the river eventually cuts through its banks, leaving a portion of the channel isolated to form the natural lake. Of the wide variety of aquatic plant species found in such a habitat, the submerged

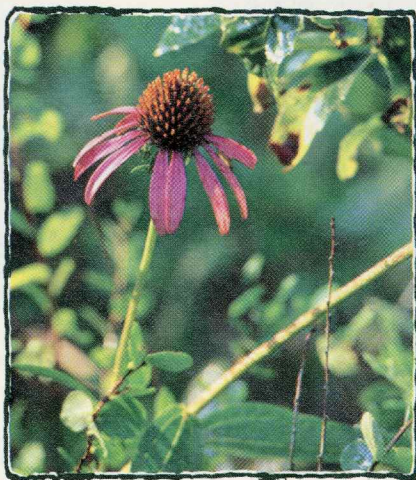
bladderwort may be the strangest. Carnivorous, the roots of the bladderwort developed hair-trigger traps that can capture and consume zooplankton unfortunate enough to venture too close.

Now nearing its end in the rich Black Belt agricultural region, the Cahaba cuts through the Selma chalk beds, which are among the richest fossil-bearing formations in Alabama, reminders of past inhabitants. At the old ghost town of Cahawba, the state's abortive first capital, the river spills into the muddy waters of the Alabama River, ending the run of the state's longest, free-flowing river at the site of what was to be the greatest of Alabama cities. This participation, this convergence of waters that is the Cahaba now joins the Alabama, already fed and grown fat from the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers, on its way to the ocean, source of life itself.

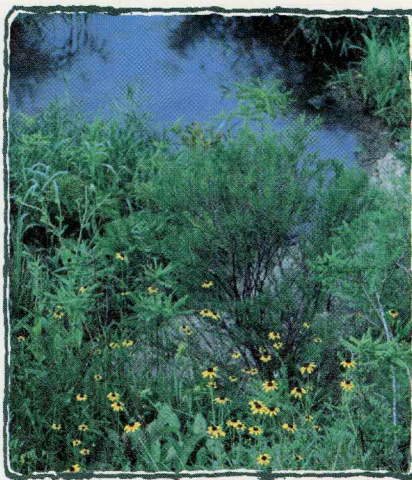


Oxbow swamp





Purple Coneflower



Lobe-leaved Black-eyed Susan



Eastern Gamagrass

# A Lost World in a Newly-Found Glade

In Bibb County, a canoe trip accidentally leads to the discovery of the greatest concentration of rare plants in the Southeastern United States

When Jim Allison and some friends went canoeing on the Little Cahaba River on Memorial Day, 1992, it was not purely for recreation's sake. Allison, a botanist with the Georgia National Heritage Program, had come to the Cahaba River some years ago on a project looking for a rare plant and knew a little about Bibb County's flora. This afternoon's outing would prove more than Allison could have dreamed.

"I was out looking for Georgia rockcress to assess its status in Alabama," he begins. "It is customary for most plants and animals to be found and identified around bridge crossings since most biologists are out looking by car. I figured looking by canoe might turn up something." He did—a rocky, barren-looking stretch of nearly treeless land along a bank of the Little Cahaba. "I had to get out and see what it was all about," Allison says. "As soon as I looked at the place, it had the general aspects I recognized as a glade, but many of the plants didn't fit. After looking into the glade, I realized why: some are new to science and some are not known for 100, 200, 500 miles away."

Clearly this does not happen every day; in fact, such a discovery has not occurred in recent history in North America. "It would be considered significant but not terribly shocking to hear of a similar find in the jungles of Southeast Asia," Allison says, "but a find like this in Eastern North America is unheard of in our century. I don't know how far back in time you'd have to go to find a comparable event." As one might surmise, the canoe outing fell by the wayside. As far as Allison was concerned, the glade was his most pressing concern. "I would go there every week or two and always find something new," he explains with a laugh. "It wasn't until after a couple of years that I ran out of new things." And he did find the limestone-loving rockcress that brought him to Bibb County in the first place.

A glade is a biological island in an unforested habitat surrounded by woods. Essentially cut off and isolated from other similar ecosystems, the glade has the opportunity to develop in its own peculiar manner. Near the Little Cahaba, a small area contains several glades resembling nothing so much as dry, rocky patches of relatively lifeless undergrowth. Stunted pines arduously grow from the outcroppings, some of which may be 100 years old, yet barely reach 15 feet. The land, surrounded by forest and scattered farms, is incapable of any commercial agricultural use and thus has been left alone by adjacent farmers and landowners. Unlike much of the neighboring woodland areas, the idea of using this land for timber is not an issue. And that may be what has preserved this botanical Eden, since to the untrained eye, not many would assign the property any real commercial value.

Fortunately, over the past few years, trained eyes have discovered otherwise, and led by the efforts of The Nature Conservancy of Alabama, they have done something to help guarantee the glades' preservation. "When Jim let us know he discovered a totally new habitat and new taxa, plus a host of other rare species not found in Alabama, the first step was to identify and document the scientific and biological significance of the discovery," says Chris Oberholster, Director of Science and Stewardship for The Nature Conservancy of Alabama. To this end, Oberholster began working with the Alabama Natural Heritage program of The Nature Conservancy, mapping the area, and performing the intensive groundwork necessary to begin investigating



A glade along the Little Cahaba River with American water willows in the shoals.

first what the Conservancy might be dealing with. Only then would they know how best to protect the rare species of flora.

The picture that began to emerge was one of geography, rural isolation, and geology. The rare plants grow in an area of considerable geological diversity because three physiographic provinces—each with a distinctive flora—intersect in Bibb County: the Upper Coastal Plain, the Cumberland Plateau, and the Ridge and Valley. Al Schotz, a biologist with the Natural Heritage Program, explains. "You can stand in one place and see the cove forests of the Southern Appalachians with their sugar maple, basswood, and beech. You can turn 45 degrees and see species common to Texas and the Midwestern prairie such as Prairie Cover, Royal Catchfly, Maidenbush, and a variety of prairie grasses. Then you can turn another 45 degrees and see species from the Coastal Plain: dwarf palmetto, Spanish moss, and longleaf pine." And since the area near the Little Cahaba River is sparsely populated, much of this unique environment has remained undisturbed.

But perhaps most importantly, nearly half of the rare plant species are found near or on a sedimentary rock known as Ketona Dolomite. Composed of calcium magnesium carbonate, this dolomite is classified as upper-Cambrian—in other words, ancient. It comes to the surface in only a few places on the earth. The difference between this dolomite and the more common kinds found in Alabama and other southeastern states is the unusual purity. What this means is the soil coming from the Ketona Dolomite is exceptionally high in magnesium, an element plants require, but find toxic in high concentrations. As a result, only specially adapted plants could survive in the dry, magnesium-laden soil, and significantly, because of this selection process, these plants could evolve without danger of competition. Alone, unfettered, and in a special environment, many of the newly-discovered species share primitive features. Considering this and the fact that several species' nearest known location is 600 to 800 miles away in Texas, Virginia, or Oklahoma, it is reasonable to assume this plant community is an ancient one, a "lost world" as biologists like to call such a find.

The list of rare species or plants previously unknown to science is impressive. So far, the seven endemic plants found nowhere else in the world are new species or varieties of Indian paintbrush, prairie-clover,

daisy fleabane, blazing-star, false-gromwell, rosinweed, tickseed, and the gentian pinkroot. In addition, eight more plants never before found in Alabama were located in the glades, including dwarf horse-nettle, a plant thought to be extinct since the 1830's when it was twice found in Georgia. The gentian pinkroot, a Nationally Endangered Species, was previously only known to exist in a few small populations in the Florida Panhandle. There it is in danger of extinction. In Bibb County, there are several thousand such plants. Some 25 other plants considered rare by the Alabama Natural Heritage Program are found in the glade, bringing the total number of rare species of plants to 70.

After The Nature Conservancy began the preliminary work of discovering what they were dealing with, a Site Conservation Planning team began to develop a comprehensive plan to protect the glades. Moving into the protection phase, they started contacting landowners who might want to work in a partnership to protect the glade. The Bibb County Commission, the largest partner thus far, is working in close cooperation with the Conservancy, having already sold them 156 acres. In some cases the Conservancy buys or accepts a donation of property from landowners, receives a conservation easement to a property, or enters into a cooperative management agreement with landowners where the Conservancy offers their expertise on how one might manage the rare species. Though several deals are still pending, and in many ways the stewardship of The Nature Conservancy is just beginning, Chris Oberholster is already clear on one aspect of the glade preservation. "Further down the road, we really intend for the public to have access to our preserve," he states. "We made a commitment to the Bibb County Commission that we would do it that way, and the public would keep having access where it is ecologically viable." Through the efforts of the Conservancy and the goodwill of several landowners, such an achievement is drawing closer every day for Alabama citizens.

As for Jim Allison, that fine spring day in 1992 when he happened upon what was probably the discovery of his life, he must have felt he was walking in a new, undiscovered country. In biological or ecological terms, he was. "It is certainly one of the biggest finds in the Southeast," asserts Chris Oberholster. "It is very rare to find so many new species and on top of that, you're looking at 60-70 rare plants in a few square miles

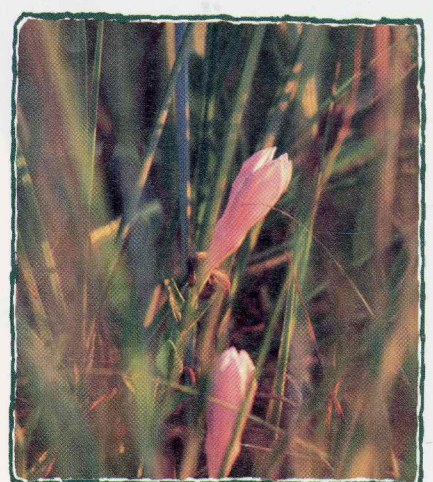




Smooth Blazing-star



Rosinweed



Alabama Pinkroot

which makes it probably the greatest concentration of rare species in the temperate Southeast."

But in terms of historic continuity, it is mildly ironic that 150 years ago, a new blast furnace was completed near an outcropping of Ketona Dolomite adjacent to the Little Cahaba River. Called both Brighthope and the Little Cahaba Furnace, it was one of the first built in

Alabama. Trees were felled for miles in every direction to make charcoal, and even today, there are bits of slag remaining as evidence of the ironworks' massive output. That so many rare species still thrive on that same site is remarkable. But unlike the past when this area was valued primarily for the mineral resources and what could be taken and made from the land, today the glade

area is treasured simply for what it is, for what remains. Recognized finally for its tremendous biological diversity, the Bibb County glades are a singular reminder of the twin legacies of our rich industrial past and the increasingly celebrated, if imperiled, ecological diversity of the present.

#### Rare Plant Species of Bibb County, Alabama:

##### Undescribed Taxa

1. prairie clover, *Dalea* sp. nov.
2. coreopsis, *Coreopsis grandiflora* var. nov.
3. false-gromwell, *Onosmodium* sp. nov.
4. daisy-fleabane, *Erigeron strigosus* var. nov.
5. blazing-star, *Liatris* sp. nov.
6. Indian paintbrush, *Castilleja* sp. nov.
7. rosinweed, *Silphium* sp. nov.

##### Federally Listed/State Record

8. Alabama pinkroot, *Spigelia gentianoides* var. *alabamensis*

##### Other Federally Listed

9. Mohr's Barbara's buttons, *Marshallia mohrii*
10. Tennessee yellow-eyed-grass, *Xyris tennesseensis*

##### Formerly Presumed Extinct

11. dwarf horse-nettle, *Solanum pumilum*

##### Other Federal Candidate/State Record

12. Thorne's beaksedge, *Rhynchospora thornei*

##### Other Federal Candidates

13. Cahaba lily, *Hymenocallis coronaria*
14. Alabama croton, *Croton alabamensis*
15. Alabama snow-wreath, *Neviusia alabamensis*
16. Georgia aster, *Aster georgianus*
17. Georgia rockcress, *Arabis georgiana*
18. impressed-nerved sedge, *Carex impressinervia*
19. jamesianthus, *Jamesianthus alabamensis*

20. lobe-leaved black-eyed-Susan, *Rudbeckia triloba* var. *pinnatiloba*

21. Nevius' stonecrop, *Sedum nevii*
22. southern columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis* var. *australis*
23. yellow least gladeceess, *Leavenworthia exigua* var. *lutea*

##### Other State Records

24. blue wild indigo, *Baptisia australis*
25. false-cloak fern, *Astrolepis integerrima*
26. shining ladies'-tresses, *Spiranthes lucida*
27. Virginia nailwort, *Paronychia virginica*
28. wiry beaksedge, *Rhynchospora capillacea*

##### Other Rarities

29. Alabama lipfern, *Cheilanthes alabamensis*
30. Alabama phlox, *Phlox pulchra*
31. Alabama skullcap, *Scutellaria alabamensis*
32. Allegheny spurge, *Pachysandra procumbens*
33. bay star-vine, *Schisandra coccinea*
34. big-flowered grass-of-Parnassus, *Parnassia grandifolia*
35. bulblet bladderfern, *Cystopteris bulbifera*
36. Butler's quillwort, *Isoetes butleri*
37. croomia, *Croomia pauciflora*
38. decumbent toadshade, *Trillium decumbens*
39. Elliott's fan-petal, *Sida elliotii*
40. false rue-anemone, *Isopyrum biternatum*
41. heart-leaved plantain, *Plantago cordata*
42. ginseng, *Panax quinquefolius*

43. Great Plains ladies'-tresses, *Spiranthes magnicamporum*

44. ivory sedge, *Carex eburnea*
45. lesser white-topped sedge, *Rhynchospora colorata*
46. limestone adder's-tongue fern, *Ophioglossum engelmannii*
47. maidenbush, *Andrachne phyllanthoides*
48. Nashville breadroot, *Pedimelum subacaule*
49. needle palm, *Rhapidophyllum hystrix*
50. one-flowered cancer-root, *Orobancha uniflora*
51. ovate maidenfern, *Thelypteris ovata*
52. plains poppy-mallow, *Callirhoe alcaeoides*
53. prickly-ash, *Zanthoxylum americanum*
54. purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*
55. royal catchfly, *Silene regia*
56. shadow-witch, *Ponthieva racemosa*
57. small-flowered phacelia, *Phacelia dubia* var. *dubia*
58. Smith's sunflower, *Helianthus smithii*
59. smooth blazing-star, *Liatris cylindracea*
60. soapwort gentian, *Gentiana saponaria*
61. spring coralroot, *Corallorhiza wisteriana*
62. streambank St. John's-wort, *Hypericum nudiflorum*
63. striped gentian, *Gentiana villosa*
64. sunnysbells, *Schoenolirion croceum*
65. Wherry's catchfly, *Silene caroliniana* ssp. *wherryi*
66. white four-o'clock, *Mirabilis albida*
67. white-leaved bunchflower, *Melanthium hybridum*
68. widespread gladeceess, *Leavenworthia uniflora*
69. Wood's false-hellebore, *Veratrum woodii*
70. Yellowwood, *Cladrastis kentuckea*



Typical late summer glade scene. Photos by Beth Maynor Young.





# THE PARADOX OF THE INSIGNIFICANT:

Probably extirpated  
(or no longer found  
in the Cahaba River):

Upland combshell  
Southern acornshell  
Southern combshell  
Alabama moccasinshell  
Southern clubshell  
Heavy pigtoe  
6 species probably  
extirpated

Endangered,  
threatened or of  
special concern  
(declining numbers):

Butterfly  
Alabama rainbow  
Ridged mapleleaf  
Southern rainbow  
Delicate spike  
Triangular kidneyshell  
Alabama hickorynut  
Ovate clubshell  
Southern hickorynut  
Coosa moccasinshell  
Alabama creekmussel  
Black sandshell  
Southern creekmussel  
Alabama heelsplitter  
Fine-lined pocketbook  
Orange-nacre mucket  
16 declining species

Just below Centreville, the Cahaba River leaves the ridges and valleys of the Appalachian foothills and enters the Coastal Plain, crossing the geological attribute known as the Fall Line, a border marking the northernmost ascension of the ocean in millennia past. The change is dramatic. Traveling here through ancient seabeds, cutting into soft alluvial soil, the river broadens and deepens as it leaves rocky shoals, slowing as the surrounding landscape gives way to plains, pasture, and wetlands. Huge gravel and sand bars line the river shaded by baldcypress draped with Spanish moss.

On one such sandbar, a group of canoeists are finishing their lunch during a break from paddling when the outing's leader, Randy Haddock, abruptly stands up, faces the group with a handful of shells and almost apologetically—as if he can no longer keep it to himself—interjects, “Okay, you knew it was coming. Now it's time for my speech on mussels.”

Alabama rainbow, butterfly, southern fatmucket, monkey face, pistol grip, heelsplitter, pimple-back, and three-horned wartback are just some of their names—hardly the reason anyone went canoeing on the Cahaba that fall day. Hardly what any of the paddlers expected, but to Haddock, the Cahaba River Society's Field Director, mussels are a passion because these small, seemingly insignificant bivalves represent a pivotal indicator species that can dramatically inform us of the river's health and well-being.

Found in nearly every lake, swamp, reservoir or river, mussel harvesting in Alabama is a billion-dollar industry, but it is the irony of appearing inconsequential that makes mussels, bottom-dwelling filter-feeders, one of “The Little Things that Run the World,” to borrow biologist E. O. Wilson's phrase. You do not usually see them or even pay attention when finding their shells on the banks of a river or lake, but the general health of those bodies of water may very well be dependent upon the little fellows. And what increasingly causes 71% of the 300 native North American mussel species to be named by the American Fisheries Association as extinct or in decline reflects directly upon the quality of water in our rivers and the quality of water coming out of our kitchen faucet. In the case of the Cahaba River, they are one and the same.

When one thinks of threatened species, one hardly imagines freshwater mussels. Bald eagles, the Florida panther, and spotted owls are so much more dramatic, so much more fashionable. And

sellable. You might buy a stuffed toy owl; however, a child asking for a clam doll is another story. Lying in nearly every aquatic habitat, these bivalves bury anywhere from 30% to 100% of their shells, sometime several feet below the river bed. They get dirty. You cannot see them. They lie passively sucking down water, filtering out nutrients, and expelling what they do not need. A one-legged turtle could probably beat a mussel in a race—without a handicap. Their role in the ecosystem of a river lacks the glamour of their feathery, flying counterparts. But do not underestimate the mussel's importance.

It is a simple fact that water downstream from mussel beds—which can contain more than 20 mussels per square foot of river bottom—is cleaner than water upstream since in the process of feeding, mussels remove impurities from the water. “In some cases, at least historically, they lived in very high numbers and filtered a significant portion of the volume of water going down the river,” Haddock explains. “Most of the water in the river would have gone through a mussel on the way down. Of course this is less true today since the numbers have dropped off so dramatically.”

Of the 42 species of mussels historically found in the Cahaba River—more than three times the historic number given for the continent of Europe—at last count, barely half could be found in the river system. Of the nearly 300 species in North America, 200 of them, at one point at least, were found in Alabama. “The Nature Conservancy folks have pulled together information using their own designation as imperiled,” Haddock says, “and looking at the different major classes like mammals, amphibians, reptiles, birds and so forth in North America, the birds have something like 11% of the species imperiled, the reptiles have 14%, the amphibians 26% to 30%, the fish 36%, and the mussels have 71%, which shows you the more aquatic the group, the more imperiled it seems to be.”

The results of each major study of Cahaba mussel populations reads like a small town obituary where each loss is sorely felt. In 1938, Henry van der Schalie, an expert on freshwater mussels, collected mussel specimens throughout the Cahaba system, locating some 42 species. In 1973, a survey by Charles Baldwin found only 31. In the past 20 years the numbers have dwindled still further. In the summer of 1994, biologists from the Geological Survey of Alabama found only 27 mussel species after an intensive survey. Considering this alone, it becomes clear that mussels are one of the most sensitive of aquatic creatures, providing an early warning, like a canary in a coal mine, that something is wrong.





# Messages Found in Mussels

Mussels rely on fish species to reproduce. Having descended from marine ancestors, the first freshwater mussels had an upstream and certainly uphill task colonizing rivers on their way inland from bays and estuaries. Essentially, mussels are spectacular hitchhikers, relying on fish to perform the otherwise arduously slow and vulnerable voyage upstream. Male mussels release sperm into the water, usually during spring, which fertilizes the eggs in the female. Larval mussels called "glochidia" are then stored by the millions in the nursery of mom's gills until mature. And here's the rub. To ensure survival of larva, the female mussel can not just release larva and hope they find a new home. Consequently, a fascinating process has evolved linking mussel to fish in a host relationship often extremely species specific. And extremely strange.

**T**he pocketbook mussel, like many of its fellows, has evolved a singular fleshy appendage resembling a small minnow that flickers and floats in the water, the equivalent of a good pair of legs in a bad movie. To a hungry bass, this signals lunchtime. But as soon as the bass gets close to the bait, the female releases her glochidia which happily attach to the gills of the bass. This free ride just happens to coincide with the fish's trip upstream during spawning. Similar tactics to fool other fish insure a wide dispersal of the species otherwise impossible for the passive, slow-moving shellfish. But since each specific "lure" is linked to attract a specific fish species, such an ingenious method is not without a price. Like dominoes lined up on a table, remove one fish population from the mussel's breeding habitat through whatever reason—a chemical spill, untreated sewage, an abundance of fertilizers entering the river after a rain, heavy siltation from construction sites, anything—and the river potentially loses the mussels dependent on that fish. And we are losing species before we can even learn more about them.

"Right now, we don't know what most species use for lures and what most species have as fish hosts," admits Haddock. "We are losing them before we know. We won't understand rivers, and we won't really know how to protect them until we understand more about the life histories of each of these species. Until then, assessing the single greatest threat to the Cahaba is like asking what's the most important organ in your body."

In the case of mussels, losing the fish host and expecting everything to work is akin to removing someone's kidney and hoping things will continue as before. This dependence on fish by mussels can be precarious since in the absence of a certain fish, the mussels cannot simply chase after it. Without the fish, the mussel may not be able to reproduce.

In addition to such a fate, when water quality plummets from pollutants, the mussel will close its shell and try to wait out the problem, effectively ceasing any reproductive efforts. If it is short term, the mussel may live. If it is not a short term condition, the mussel will eventually starve, weaken, and die.

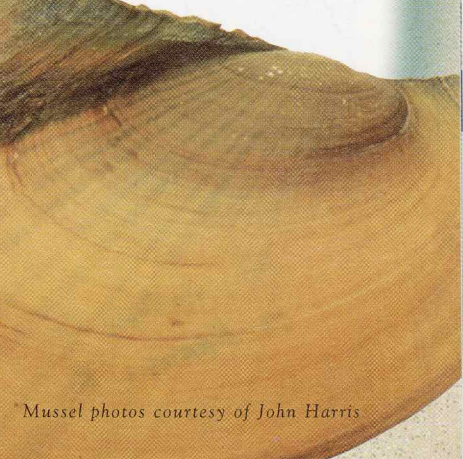
The Southern historian C. Vann Woodward has said, with quite ironic intent, that "there is, of course, a thing called history, but history is something unpleasant that happens to other people." It occurs in other places far away, usually in the past, leaving the present to appear almost like a vacuum where concepts like "time," "progress" and "change" remain only vague phrases without direct, physical meaning to our everyday lives. Obscured by the problems and concerns of the day, history occurs here and now though we may fail to appreciate it. We are then slow to act, thinking our actions have little or no effect. Like actors in a Shakespearean play, we speak our asides and speeches to the audience who fully grasp the plot; however, for whatever dramatic cause, as actors, we somehow fail to understand our own motives and needs until the tragic flourish of the curtain.

**C**onsidering the general decline of mussel health in the Cahaba River, one can view the enormous loss of mussel species that has already occurred in terms of history; it has passed. Though not readily available in history books, you can read about it if you choose. In contrast, the great number of imperiled species striving to survive in an increasingly hostile environment are struggling now against attrition. Look closely and you can see the impending signs that history occurs now. That this is a moment of inception. That actions have an effect when people are moved to act. History is a continual process, not a state of being.

It may be the paradox mussels present in the Cahaba that finally attracts Randy Haddock's gaze as he scowls at passing sandbars, stopping briefly amidst the meandering current, looking for the sign of shells. As the group of canoeists reach the end of the day's run, Haddock lingers in the shoals, seeing beneath the water what many do not. "Mussels are a red-flag warning. It's not completely clear that a whole different kind of structural organization has occurred because of the decline of mussel populations," he says. "I wish I knew. I wish we had a natural, intact, southeastern river to look at to make such a judgement." Where would you have to go to find such a system, I ask? After a pause, Randy Haddock smiles. "The Cahaba," he answers, with a matter-of-fact laugh, knowing full well that a natural, intact river system is, unfortunately, a relative term.

## Stable species:

Three-ridge  
Flat floater  
Elephant ear  
Little spectaclecase  
Gulf pigtoe  
Fawnsfoot  
Ebonyshell  
Pistolgrip  
Southern pocketbook  
Lilliput  
Southern fatmucket  
Monkeyface  
Yellow sandshell  
Alabama orb  
Fragile papershell  
Southern mapleleaf  
Washboard  
Bleufer  
Three-horned  
wartyback  
Spike  
20 stable species





# A Capital Carved in Wilderness

*"And Cahaba! Cahaba!  
so brilliant and gay,  
Is left to destruction,  
neglect, and decay;  
Her children are scattered  
like the sands of the sea,  
And ruin now rests on our  
fair Galilee."*

from *Memories of Old Cahaba*  
by Anna M. Gayle Fry (1905)

Tales swirl of the ghost town Cahawba, Alabama's first state capital from 1820-1825. Perhaps rightly so, since a city that no longer exists cannot exonerate or explain itself and must remain defenseless forever. Correspondences, anecdotes, a few photographs, and entries in old Senate journals from the early 19th century are all that remain, and the stories of the town's rise, fall, and rise again remain as murky as the junction of the Cahaba and Alabama rivers along her banks.

After the Creek Indian War, an extension of the War of 1812 between the upstart United States and Great Britain, settlers poured into the territory of Alabama. Andrew Jackson, with his decisive vic-

tory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River, effectively broke the power of the Indians in Alabama forever in 1814, and "Alabama Fever" as the rush was called, had caught settlers' imagination. After being admitted into the Union five years later, divisions were deep over a site for the new state's capital. Alabama's first governor, William Wyatt Bibb, threw in with fellow Georgians and proceeded to wrestle and harangue until the State Assembly named Cahawba the seat of government. In a note to the assembly on November 8, 1818, he explained his decision:

The bluff on the west side of those rivers present a beautiful site, with springs of good water and the prospect of health. Situated on a river capable of being navigated by boats of great burthen, and supported as it will be by the abundant production of an extensive and fertile back country on the Alabama and Cahawba and their tributary streams, the town of Cahawba promises to vie with the largest inland towns in the country.

Critics of Bibb's decision remained, and they sullenly added a constitutional provision ordering the assembly to meet in Cahawba only until 1825 when a more permanent site could be chosen. To add further insult to Bibb's choice, the assembly allocated only \$10,000 to establish a temporary capital building for the general assembly to meet in, a not-so-subtle hint that many relished the coming of 1825. Capricious Nature, the premature death

of Bibb in 1820 after a fall from his horse, and political enemies of Cahawba ensured that Bibb's dream would soon follow him to the grave.

But not everyone disapproved of Cahawba. Many former soldiers with Jackson's army eventually settled along the Alabama and Cahaba, referring to the region as the "Acadia of America." The Cahaba was "one of the most beautiful small rivers they had seen," an open land of prairie and dense woods, "abundantly supplied with excellent seats for water works of, almost, any kind." Indeed, numerous newly-dug artesian wells gushed forth water in abundance for the settlers and provided a cheap, clean water source for all.

Things moved quickly in Cahawba. A land office was opened to sell 1,620 acres given by the government to raise funds for the venture. Nearby land sold for \$1.25 an acre. Within weeks, the same property went for \$60 and \$70 an acre. By 1822, unimproved lots in the central part of town sold for as high as \$5,025.

Original street plans modeled after Philadelphia were laid out on a grid pattern, culminating in Arch Street overlooking the Alabama River on the site of an old Indian town. Soon the blossoming capital had many stores, two newspapers, a state bank, hotels, two ferries, and an imposing capital building of solid brick two stories high, capped by a dome said to be similar to the capital at St. Augustine; however, no known picture or painting of the building exists.

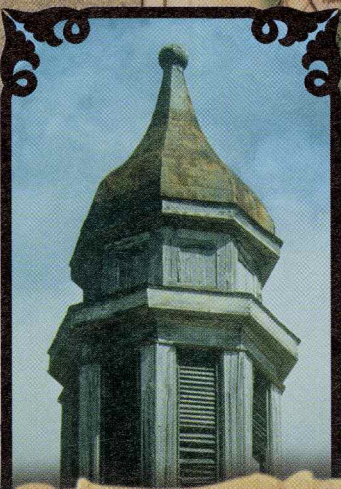
Kirkpatrick House, turn of the century.

The grand Saltmarsh Hall was built, a female academy was established, as were many grand homes—mansions even—that stagger the imagination such as the Perine, Kirkpatrick, and Crocheron residences. Records show that by income, Dallas County was the wealthiest in the state and ranked among the top five counties nationwide.





Dome of State capital, moved from Cahawba to Lowndesboro's Methodist Episcopal Church

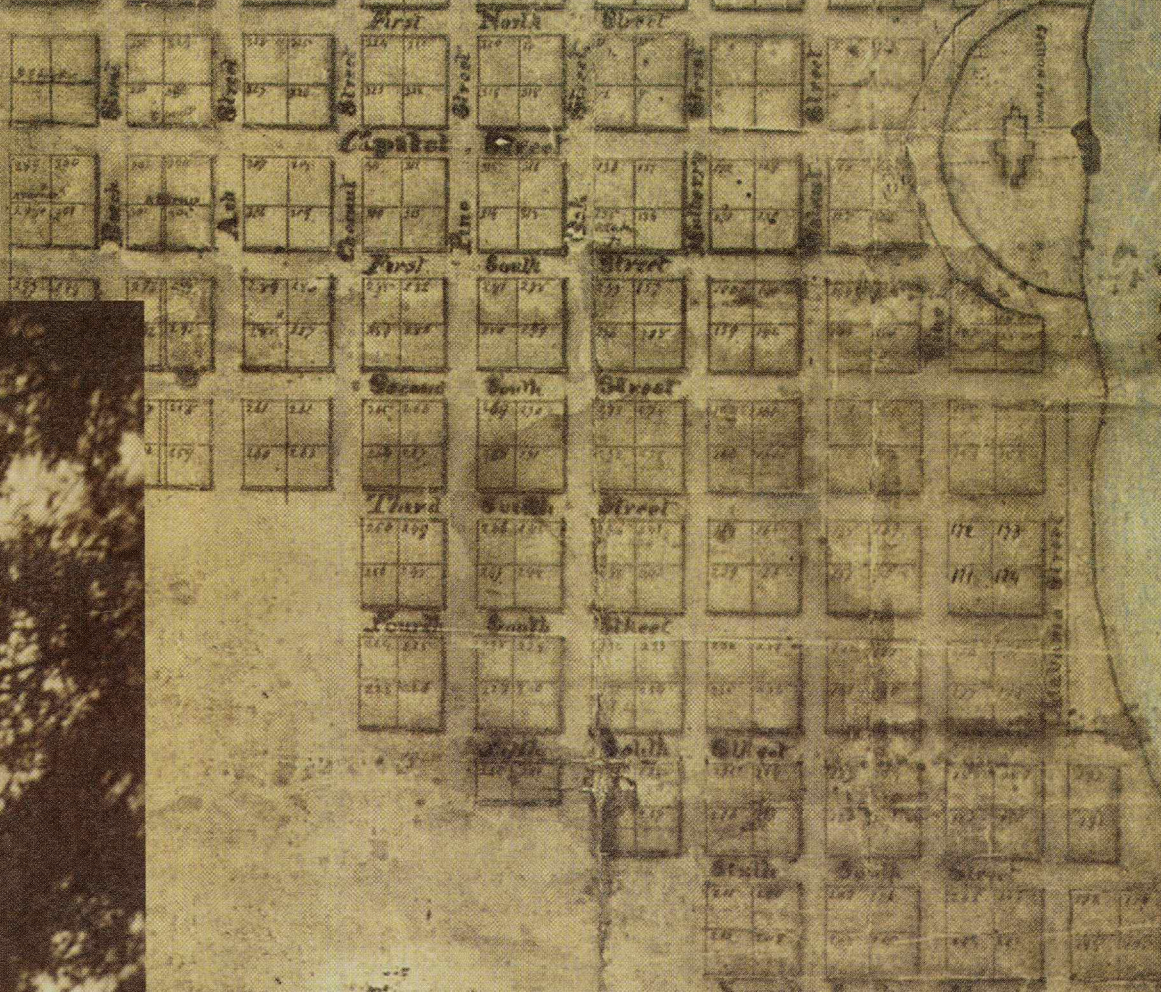


Key to  
Alabama's  
first  
permanent  
statehouse

ALABAMA

Geographical,  
statistical, and  
historical map of  
Alabama, 1822  
by F. Lucas -  
Courtesy of  
Birmingham  
Public Library  
Department of  
Southern History  
and Archives

MAP  
OF THE  
TOWN  
CAHAWBA.

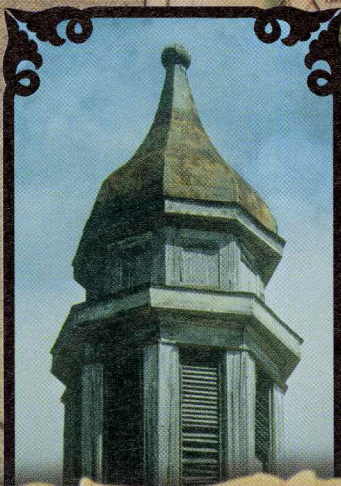


Perine House

Then came the War Between the States, effectively crushing any hopes of becoming the "great inland town of Alabama," much less the New York of the South as many had hoped.



Dome of State capital, moved from Cahawba to Loundesboro's Methodist Episcopal Church



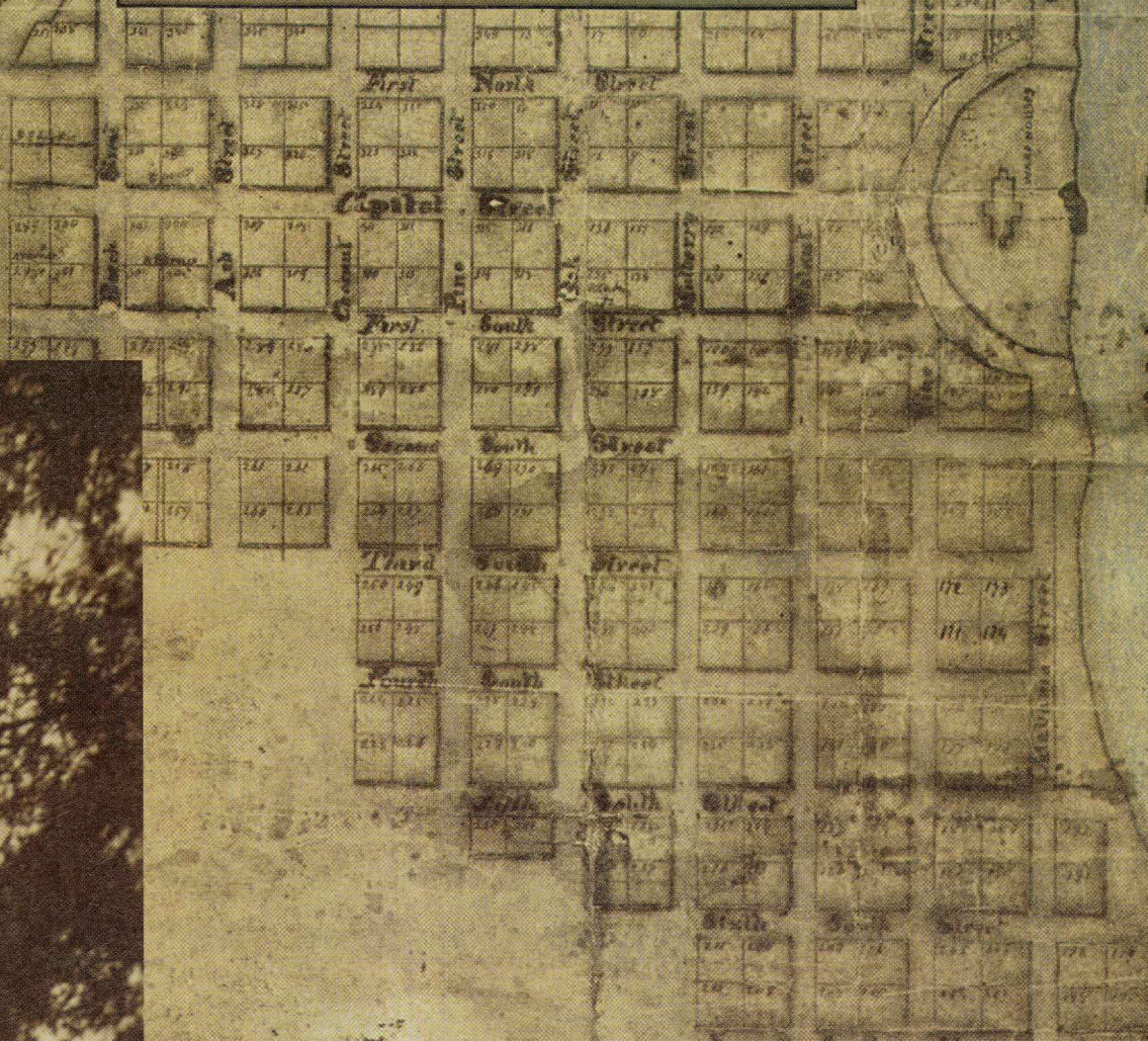
Key to  
Alabama's  
first  
permanent  
statehouse



ALABAMA

Geographical, statistical, and historical map of Alabama, 1822 by F. Lucas - Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library Department of Southern History and Archives

MAP  
OF THE  
TOWN  
OF  
CAHAWBA.

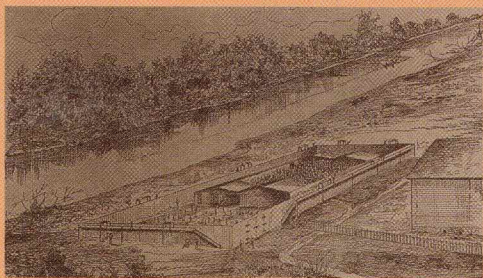


Perine House

Then came the War Between the States, effectively crushing any hopes of becoming the "great inland town of Alabama," much less the New York of the South as many had hoped.



# Cahawba and the Civil War



## CAHABA FEDERAL PRISON (CASTLE MORGAN)

Samuel Hill, a well-off planter and merchant of Cahawba, purchased two lots by the new Cahawba-Marion railroad in 1860 and began building a warehouse in which to store cotton and corn. Things were looking up. Then war came, and, as is the pattern in the town's history, things quickly turned sour. Only the walls and part of the warehouse's roof were finished when the Confederate Congress appropriated the railroad—spikes, bolts, nuts, and rails—to finish a more important line connecting Selma and Demopolis. For a Confederacy that in 1861 had roughly 110,000 manufacturing workers compared to the North's overwhelming 110,000 manufacturing plants, a partly finished cotton warehouse deep in Alabama was not going to lie unused. In June of 1863, Cahaba Federal Prison was opened.

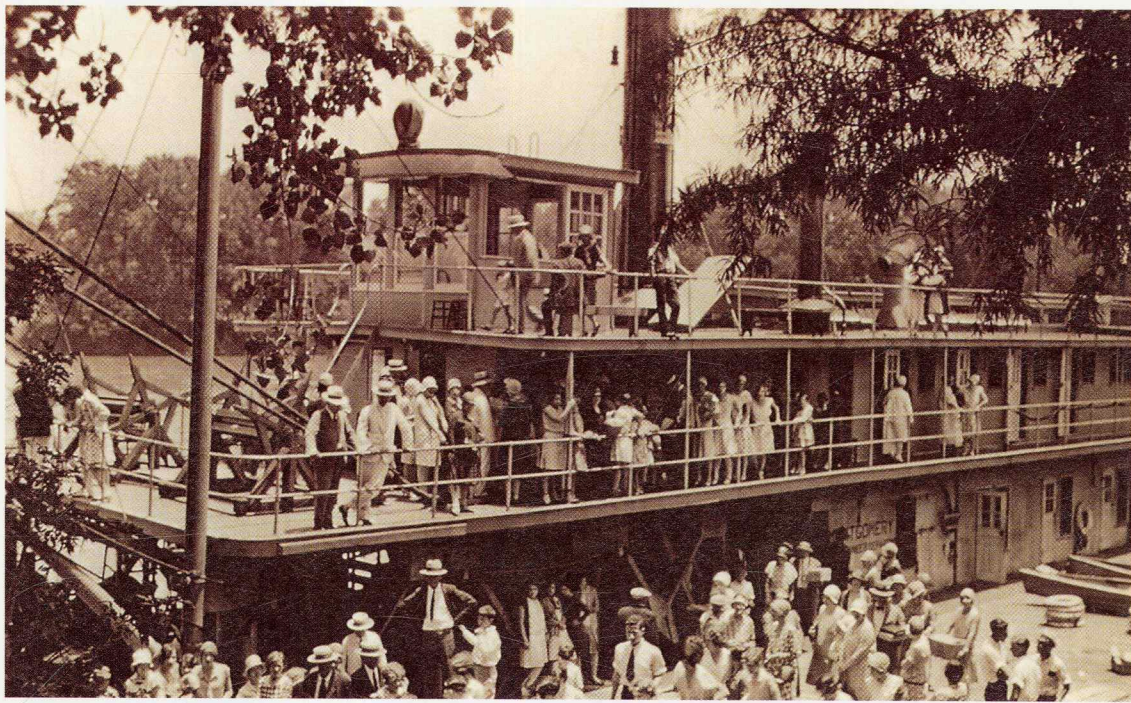
In five months, the snug 15,000 square feet crawled with 660 Union prisoners. R. H. Whitfield, the prison surgeon, reported generally poor conditions at the camp, citing the unsanitary water supply entering the compound dirtied by "washings of the hands, feet, faces, and heads of soldiers, citizens, and negroes, buckets, tubs, and spittoons of groceries, offices and hospital, hogs, dogs, cows, and horses, and filth of all kinds from the streets and other sources." The building had one fireplace and no bedding—much less straw—for the mere 432 bunk spaces. When newly-opened Andersonville Prison in Georgia soon filled, Castle Morgan (as Cahaba Federal Prison was called locally after Confederate cavalry general John Hunt Morgan's famous escape from Ohio State Penitentiary) overflowed with 3,000 captured Union Soldiers.

Nothing was adequate at Castle Morgan: food, clothing, shelter, firewood, sanitary conditions. Some died of pneumonia and dysentery, but the prison death rate remained at 5%, surprisingly low for the Civil War, especially considering the fact that so many Confederate soldiers endured severe privation at the same time. And while the North's prison death rate reached 12%, the South's was not far behind at 15.5%, much closer than one might expect. Confederate and Federal records say that between 142 and 147 men died at Castle Morgan. Though the number may be slightly higher, for the 5,000 men interred there as inmates, this remains exceptional for prisons of that time, giving some idea of just how inadequate the many worse prisons under both Confederate and Union flag must have been.

## THE SULTANA BURNS

If you discount Gettysburg and some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, the *Sultana* disaster ranks as perhaps the greatest tragedy after the years of woe the fighting wrought. Toiling homeward up the Mississippi River after the war's end, the boat held 2,300 freed Union prisoners from Cahaba and Andersonville were on board, as well as a thousand bushels of fuel, making the steamboat *Sultana* dangerously overloaded. Indeed, rated for only 376 passengers and crew, the 260-foot steamer nearly capsized in Arkansas when hundreds of men rushed to one side posing for a photographer setting up for a shot of the heavy-laden vessel.

After picking up the soldiers in Vicksburg, a chaotic, undisciplined event, the *Sultana* planned to release them in Cairo, Illinois. But eight miles past Memphis, at 2:00 a.m. the first boiler exploded. Two others quickly followed. It is thought that the fire-tube boilers, caked with sediment from the muddy, flooding Mississippi, backed up until enough pressure built up in the overheated flue to blow the sediment out with a massive burst of steam, causing the explosion. Many died in the blast and ensuing fire. Others drowned. Only 520 survived to be hospitalized and more than 200 of this number died soon after. It was a time of great tragedy in America. John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln April 15, 1865, and less than two weeks later, on April 27, the *Sultana* took more than 1,600 down with her.



Riverboat excursion to Cahaba from Selma in 1920's

The national economic panic of 1819 finally reached Alabama, forcing many into debt. The summers of 1821 and 1822 were no kinder, introducing a "bilious remitting fever" identified by Dr. Jabez Wiggins Heustis as yellow fever which caused many deaths. Critics of Cahawba now had more reasons to mutter under their breath—and in public. But in 1821, something amazing occurred. Though not the first to do so, a steamboat named *Harriet* defeated the Alabama's mighty current, passing Cahawba on her way to Montgomery. Crowds cheered and celebrated, realizing what a portent this was. Previously, ever-increasing bales of cotton from surrounding plantations went downstream by flatboats: the rare keelboat of goods made its way back to Cahawba. *Harriet* and her like promised to change all that, if only given the chance.

By 1822, heavy rainfall brought the rivers up and into the town's outer limits, and opportunists began calling more vociferously for the capital's removal. Rumors spread of the town's unhealthy location and propensity to flood, exaggerating both so that many in the state thought legislators actually had used rowboats to get to the state used house—and enter through the second floor window because the flooding was so bad. Linda Derry, Park Manager/Site Archeologist of the Alabama Historical Commission in Selma, will have none of this. "In my personal opinion—and I have charted the floods and located the elevations to reconstruct back to 1819—the first flood to top the bluff at Cahawba was in 1865. After this it got progressively worse. It is pretty apparent that it's the way we've been treating our environment that has caused the floods. With timber harvested clearing the land for cotton and the ensuing erosion, isn't it ironic that the same thing that created Cahawba—cotton—destroyed Cahawba?" Not surprisingly, high school textbooks more than 130 years after the supposed event continued telling a story of bad politicians making bad decisions, relishing, one supposes, the high drama of it all, when the whole time, it may have been the consequences of over-planting cotton. "This tells us a lot about Alabamians and how we use our past to explain the present," Derry concludes.

However, one event in the lives of Cahawba citizens did succeed. By 1825, the Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the American and French revolutions, was an old man enjoying a triumphal tour of the United States—at the nation's expense. When he arrived in Cahawba via the steamboat *Anderson* after a quick lunch in Selma, citizens of Cahawba thought their hour had come at last. And perhaps it had. A public barbecue, followed by a \$5 dinner for the well-off, toasted the general to great success. It was a shining moment in Cahawba's history. And then he was gone, leaving the state with a bill of \$16,000 (\$2,500 more than the state house eventually cost) and the reality that, as Lafayette disappeared in the distance, so to the glory days of Cahawba. While reports say the "floods" of the same year were the final insult, Derry insists this is "absolutely not true. As a matter of fact, 1825 was a drought year. It's pure storytelling." Still, on December 13, 1825—by a majority of one single vote—the capital moved to Tuscaloosa. Cahawba's capital days were done.

Soon the population dropped to as low as 300. It must have been quite a sight, the former capital building surrounded by abandoned log cabins and a few brick structures. Many of the more influential moved on, selling or bringing their houses with

them to towns like Mobile, Centreville, and Tuscaloosa. Though the capital and all prestige accompanying it were gone, boom times would return and bring masses of settlers to the Cahaba river valley. With steamboat navigation continually improving, a steady influx of people, and King Cotton raising its downy head, Cahawba, situated at such a crossroads, could not help but grow.

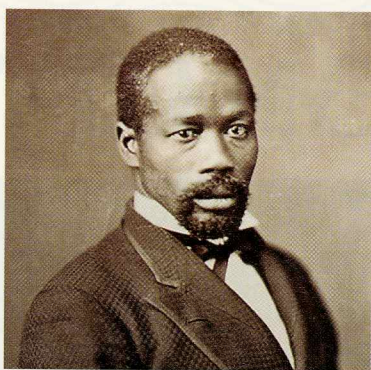
Initially, settlers arriving in Alabama's Black Belt region avoided the scrubby prairie and canebrake environs, dismissing land without trees as unfit for agricultural cultivation. Legend says some planters put a slave out in the wilderness of the Cahaba River region encumbered with barely enough supplies to survive until his first harvest, just to test the land's soil. Returning to his cabin in the fall, they found him fit, healthy to the point of putting on weight, and with an abundance of cotton in the field—not to mention a good store of vegetables as well. That was all it took, the tale continues, to spread the "Alabama Fever" that filled the valley and Black Belt with cotton farmers. By the eve of the war, Dallas County's population reflected its dominant economic activity, cotton farming, so that with the 8,000 whites in the county, nearly 25,000 blacks worked the land.

After a period of decay, by the 1840's and 50's Cahawba rose again, buoyed by the state of affairs throughout the region. Warehouses were built, old ones repaired, and the Cahaba River Packett was just one of several steamboats traveling the river during the wet season. The grand Saltmarsh Hall was built, a female academy was established, as were many grand homes—mansions even—that stagger the imagination such as the Perine, Kirkpatrick, and Crocheron residences. Records show that by income, Dallas County was the wealthiest in the state and ranked among the top five counties nationwide. The seat of Dallas, Cahawba again seemed headed for greatness and could call itself one of the state's more cosmopolitan cities, relative as that term might be. Though its upstream rival, Selma, was much larger, estimates of Cahawba's population range from 3,000 to 6,000. In 1858 a railroad connecting Cahawba with Marion arrived with much fanfare and celebration, linking as it did the former capital to inland trade routes as well as river traffic. Then came the War Between the States, effectively crushing any hopes of becoming the "great inland town of Alabama," much less the New York of the South as many had hoped.

When the county seat moved from Cahawba to Selma in 1866, several years of flooding were just one of the causes. By the 1850's, Selma eclipsed Montgomery, becoming Alabama's southern terminus for the railroad. Cahawba was being shut out of the new rivers of commerce, the rails. With the removal of the county seat, families followed. Shops closed and houses emptied. Freedmen now used the old capital building for political meetings. Cahawba became known as the "Mecca of the Republican Party" as the freedmen struggled to gain political strength. By 1870, the population hovered around 300, most of those former slaves from nearby plantations.

While the new community turned the largely vacant city lots into two-acre fields, even this incarnation of Cahawba was fated to vanish, and the town was abandoned. By the turn of the century, most of Cahawba's buildings were gone. Most of the photographic records we have date from this period when dismantled structures sold for scrap or had already begun their slow collapse into obscurity.





U.S. Congressman Jeremiah Haralson

## Emergent History Cahawba's Black Community

The tendency is strong, almost unavoidable, to write about the history of a place in one-dimensional terms—the point of view of the victors, the landed, the wealthy, the elected. The increasing stature given to oral history has to a degree changed this tendency, but all too often history is made by those who do not write histories, memoirs, letters, novels, pamphlets, or recorded documents, bound in libraries and archives easily accessible to the curious. In 1860, a full 64% of Cahawba's population was black. In Dallas County, nearly three out of every four persons was black, yet the history we often present is more than one-sided. In a democracy it is unfairly slanted in favor of the overwhelming minority: the whites.

Of course, in 1860, the South was no democracy. But that long road is another story. Prior to the Civil War, blacks in Cahawba suffered under the same harsh yoke as blacks elsewhere. A few were freed, but even free blacks could not live in town without a white guardian. And even though some could occasionally carry a gun, none were allowed out at night after the market bell had rung. Still, many learned skills allowing them to earn money on the side to spend as they wished or save to purchase their freedom. Though the details are incomplete, the famous freed slave and bridge builder Horace King may have constructed a bridge across the Cahaba River just north of town in 1854. And, as a curious side note, blacks entirely controlled Cahawba's poultry business.

It is after the war that we begin to have the recorded documents that start shedding light on the role of blacks in Cahawba, not as merely slaves, but also as people—a right long denied. Many black citizens from Cahawba played prominent roles fighting for hard-won political freedoms. Some became landowners, including the Lightnings, Arthurs, Lattimorees, and others. Jordan Hatcher, Cahawba's postmaster, was appointed to the Constitutional Convention and advocated a fair and moderate document. Tom Walker, a former slave rumored to be the son of a prominent white merchant in town, was one of Alabama's first state legislators. A highly successful lawyer in the District of Columbia, Walker was known for his philanthropy and became a trustee of Howard University.

When Dallas County moved the county seat to Selma right after the war, the town seemed finished. By 1870, only 129 whites remained, and the population hovered around 431, mostly former slaves from nearby plantations. In fact, Cahawba's greatest claim to fame at this time was the derogatory nickname Selma gave it, "Mecca of the Radical Republican Party," since the deserted courthouse was now a rallying place for freedmen



Vine Street

trying to gain political power during Reconstruction. In 1876 at the close of Reconstruction, Alabama's Democratic legislature had gerrymandered the state's congressional districts so that Selma had as many black voters as possible, meaning Democrats would have an easier time carrying the other districts. The two black candidates, ex-congressman James T. Rapier and U.S. Congressman Jeremiah Haralson of Dallas County essentially split the Republican ticket. The minority Democrats of the district offered their own white candidate, Sheriff Charles M. Shelly. During the campaign, Haralson was making a speech in Cahawba when one of Shelly's deputies "arrested" him in the middle of his speech and brought him to Selma for a confrontation with Shelly. The accounts of their "meeting" differed greatly: Haralson claimed he was forced at gunpoint to retract an alleged slander he had made about Shelly and was not allowed to hold any more meetings. Shelly essentially denied this, and though he failed to carry even one of the five counties in the district, he went to Washington to represent the black majority district. If a black U.S. Congressman could be treated this way by a county sheriff, could the average black citizen expect any better? Reconstruction was clearly over in Dallas County.

Though black history normally takes a leap from Reconstruction to the events of 1965 in Dallas County, we know that in the latter years of the 19th century, Cahawba gradually withered. Many buildings were moved, sold for scraps, or began a slow decline into ruin by the early 20th century. A school was built from salvaged materials for the children of local black tenant farmers that also doubled as St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church. Ironically enough, the only historical record of the school we have is the one announcing its closure in 1952. It was one of 80 segregated black schools in the county that were closed just prior to the 1954 landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education that began the slow process of integration. Today, the school is one of only three structures still standing at the Old Cahawba site.

Recently, Old Cahawba State Historical Park acquired what is identified on an old map as the "Negro

Burial ground," located across a pecan grove from another recent acquisition, a structure that for a time served as the Kirkpatrick family's slave quarters. Created around 1819, residents used the cemetery as recently as the 1950's when two brothers, Andrew and Sam Arthur, a World War I veteran, were buried there. Set in a wooded expanse between fields, the cemetery contains at least 30 headstones of people born into slavery. As one follows the winding path through the trees, a path that more than likely crosses several unmarked graves, a thick bed of leaves covers numerous depressions where the graves collapsed over the years. Here and there, small headstones dot the grounds, some engravings completely worn off. A quiet air of seclusion and grace permeates the graveyard. Before this year, public access to the cemetery was limited even for the descendants. But now, the grounds are open to all.

Speaking of the new black heritage sites protected by the park, Linda Derry is excited about the possibilities of presenting a more complete portrait of Old Cahawba and the South to visitors from around the world. "It is a good place to interpret the lives of urban enslaved laborers," she says. "People have the image of toting cotton, but these people were skilled laborers: bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers, blacksmiths and had a very different lifestyle than the one we often have in our mind. Many such as Jordan Hatcher and his sons had skills and hired their time out before the end of slavery, so that by emancipation, they could read and write and were leaders in the church and politics. I think it is a heritage people can be proud of."

Beyond Cahawba and after the demise of slavery, whether as teachers, miners, farmers, businessmen, or iron-workers, this is also true of blacks in and along the Cahaba River Valley and elsewhere. Their immense contribution to an often hostile culture can be seen everywhere in the region. As more is learned about pre-emancipation Alabama, one cannot avoid the obvious that is often obscured by the drama, the great and sordid events of the time: for all the attraction of lost antebellum glory and ruined mansions, Cahawba's foundation was built by, and perhaps upon, the sweat and skill of blacks.



Crocheron House, turn of the century.

*"But I think about the old days, Those days so bright and fair;  
And again I see Cahaba, Like a jewel, rich and rare,  
Sparkling in the sunlight Of a happy, glorious past;  
And I live again the old days, Those days too bright to last."*

from "On the Banks of Old Cahaba"

by Anna M. Gayle Fry (1905)

Crocheron house  
columns

(Continued from previous page)

ty: Columns of the female academy standing before the brick-laden ruin of the building, the two-story brick shops of Vine Street crumbling into decay, corn growing in a small plot near the old Crocheron mansion's remains where Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest met with Union Gen. Wilson to discuss an exchange of prisoners captured during the Battle of Selma. Comparing Cahawba during its zenith to that of its final collapse can be disquieting. It is a haunting commentary on the fragility and impermanence of man's tenure on this earth.

By the 1930's, few buildings remained. Fishermen and hunters moved into what once was

an urban setting now covered in woods and undergrowth. Roads leading through a capital city had become paths in a wilderness once again.

As a State Historical Park, the site today presents a marked contrast to the position Cahawba once held in Alabama history. It was a city raised with an eye to the potential, a city full of promise and a bright future. Land was cleared in the wilderness, lots drawn up and sold. People flocked to the newly declared capital, knowing or hoping that after goods flowed downstream, money would come back up. But a city made forcibly from a governor's decree rather than

through evolutionary degrees was hard-pressed to adapt from the beginning. Unincorporated as recently as 1989, in the quiet, dusty streets of Cahawba, you can still follow Arch Street as it passes into Vine Street. All the grand estates, shops, and buildings that were Cahawba have been dismantled, moved or sold for scraps, but you can see the artesian wells, some still spewing water for a populace long vanished. Collapsed cellars remain, as do the brick columns of the old Crocheron place. The people are gone, but the river that made the town possible remains.



In the early days of Cahaba River preservation, many came to the Cahaba River Society telling stories of the river, recalling old memories and anecdotes from years past. Like many Birmingham residents of his generation, John C. Henley III had tales to share of a youth and adulthood intertwined with the river. His uncle, Walter Henley, helped organize and eventually became president of the Little Cahaba Coal Company that managed the mining town of Piper near the river. John C. Henley's roots run deep when it comes to the Cahaba River. After learning of his trips from Trussville down the Cahaba and on to Mobile via the Alabama River, we felt it important to retell these stories so that others might know just one of the varied roles the Cahaba played in the community's not-so-distant past. As we looked ahead to the second issue of the *Cahaba Magazine*, we were excited to talk more with Mr. Henley, but in 1992, he passed away. However, on December 12, 1996, another generation of Henleys entered this world. Perhaps Arthur C. Parker Henley, Jr., John C. Henley's first grandson, will grow to love the Cahaba River as much as his grandfather did. In light of his early involvement with the society, and fondly remembering how he took the initiative to call us and share how important this river was to him, we have decided to dedicate this issue to John C. Henley's memory. Our hope is that those who depend on the Cahaba today will better understand how important the river was to those who came before.

# J OHN HENLEY



*Cahaba Lilies blooming near Piper early 1940's.*



*Henley on one of his many trips down the Cahaba.*

*"This is just the right size river," Henley spent on the water, "too big to wade, too*

There is a continuity that surrounds rivers, a timeless sense of the absolute we feel when confronted by such a natural force. For age upon age, the Cahaba has drawn man to it for obvious reasons such as the fresh water and food resources the river abundantly holds. But beyond the practical lies the fanciful, the recreation and fun-loving allurements the river has provided for as long as man has known the river's twisting path.

By the time he was old enough to fish, Birmingham resident John Henley was exploring the deep, shady holes of the Cahaba using hand-made plugs covered with frog skin for lures. Born in 1920, Henley was nine years old when the dam was raised at Lake Purdy on the Little Cahaba to increase the capacity of Birmingham's water supply during dry months. Until his twenties when the Oxmoor Lake dam was destroyed, he probably knew and explored the vast lake covering the area now occupied by Homewood High School. The Cahaba River and other creeks and streams in the basin were an escape for kids and adults alike, a place to go in the summer when it was too hot to do anything but laze about the banks, swim and maybe try to catch a bass or bream way back under the overhanging limbs that so encroach upon the Cahaba. The story of John Henley's experiences on the Cahaba River are in a way emblematic of a whole generation's.

The youngest of four children, Henley had three older sisters, and it might not be far-fetched to assume Henley's interest in the outdoors stemmed from what would have been waiting for him once he returned indoors. When his older sis-

ters went to town to pass the time, the baby of the family was often left at home. Naturally, he looked to the woods and rivers for entertainment. In the late 1930's, he made his first trip from Birmingham down the Cahaba to the Alabama River and on to Mobile Bay, in about two weeks. With few other boats on the Cahaba, it must have been a time of adventure. "He went to Mobile twice, often hitching a ride part of the way on barges on the Alabama," explains Arlene Henley, Mr. Henley's wife. "Once he was so tired and hungry—he had been on the river so long—the thing that scared him most was the danger of being hit by one of the barges. He had wild stories about his times on the Cahaba and enjoyed telling them. He loved the Cahaba."

A friend and traveling companion of Henley's, Sterling Wortham, lived in Birmingham building and repairing canoes among other jobs. Wortham especially remembers the canvas-covered 14½ foot canoe he made Henley in the days before aluminum dominated boat construction. "I first met John in Birmingham in 1942, and we were interested in most of the same things. I once made him a canoe with ash ribs and planking made from juniper, I think. It was much stronger than the wood a factory used. John used it for years and said the canoe stood up to the river much better than the others he'd tried."

On his early trips along the Cahaba, Henley noted that he never saw another canoe, only the wooden flatboats fishermen used to check their trotlines. It was a quiet time on the river when fishermen would tie strings weighted with a small

stone and a baited hook to branches hanging over the water. When the fish took the bait, the limb sprang up to set the hook. Just as the bushes provided fish, they also provided a brief cover for one caught in a canoe during a sudden summer down-pour. "This is just the right size river," he wrote, reflecting on his many hours spent on the water, "too big to wade, too small to boat and perfect to canoe."

As time passed, Henley's son, Walter, would often go with him on short trips down the river, swimming, canoeing, and of course, fishing. "Daddy often picked me up after school to go fishing on the Cahaba," Walter Henley recalls. "He was a fly fisherman long before it became so popular and would do it out of a canoe. He also had a way of fishing. He'd say 'Come here, son,' and he'd show me a place where the water rushed over a rock making an impression. Standing behind the rock where the feeding fish couldn't see him, he'd take a plastic worm and drop it into the hole. He caught more than one fish that way."

Much of what we have of Henley's thoughts on the river comes from a short essay he wrote entitled "Valley of the Lilies," a reference to Hargrove Shoals, a famous section of the river where the Cahaba Lily blooms so brilliantly each May and June. In the essay he recalls distant memories from much of his youth and adult life spent on the river. Muskrat and beaver, turkey, all sorts of snakes and turtles, even domestic goats and pigs gone wild were Henley's companions on his trips. Fossils lying about, abandoned old whiskey stills in the woods, and the vine-clad columns of



# A Gentleman and the River



"Nothing but a floating leaf is quite so quiet as a drifting canoe. This stillness in motion affords new discoveries around each of a thousand bends. This may be the only way to enjoy the peaceful pleasure of seeing nature the way it was just before you came into the picture. This quiet, this peace, this surprise, this discovery—these are the keynotes of the Cahaba."

from John C. Henley's  
"Valley of the Lilies"

wrote, reflecting on his many hours small to boat and perfect to canoe."

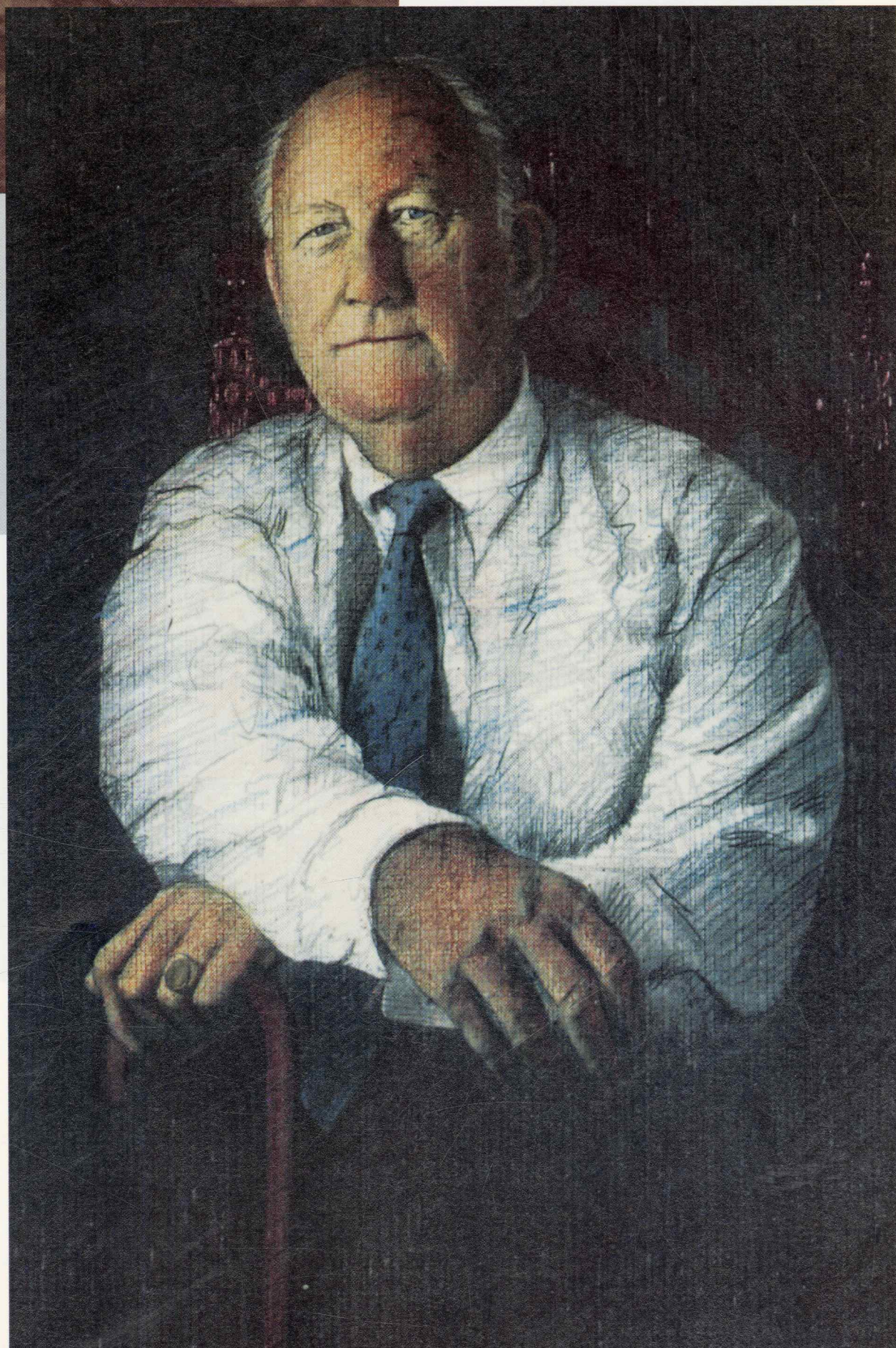
1990 portrait photograph of John C. Henley III by Beth Maynor Young, hand colored by Guy Arelló.

Old Cahawba were waiting silently to be explored. The essay also reminisces about burning hot sandbars scorching bare feet in the summer and sudden flood waters dramatically rising overnight, wetting his feet in a sleeping bag as they creep into a tent set some fifteen feet away from the river bank—presumably a safe distance.

But mostly the essay tells what it was like to be alone drifting down a river often untouched by time. A passage about the birds of the river stands out:

*I recollect birds everywhere—especially in the still morning mist on the river—a memory of the great blue heron, the crane and lesser heron, the Cooper's hawk, the goldfinch and the swallow-tailed kite. And always the kingfisher would leave his perch as you came abreast, and he would fly 100 yards ahead, seeming to repeat this all day long, although it couldn't have been the same bird.*

The overwhelming sense one has reading his thoughts on the river is one of peace, like a passage from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" expressing an "emotion recollected in tranquility." Looking back, Henley calls the Cahaba "an island of harmony in a busy world," and his most striking metaphor is to compare himself to a leaf idly floating downstream, enjoying the stillness and permanence of a place that existed long before and will continue to exist long after we are gone.





# Tannehill Furnaces:

On the afternoon of March 31, 1865, the Tannehill

Furnaces were a smoking ruin.

Three companies of the Eighth Iowa Cavalry, a detachment of Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson's raid into the state, put all three furnaces out of commission and torched the site and surrounding buildings, including cabins that housed 600 slave laborers. The sawmill, foundry, cast houses, gristmill, and nearby tannery were all destroyed. Within a month, most of the fighting would be over in the Confederacy, and the Civil War era in which the furnaces reached their highest production was gone. It would be more than 100 years before the furnaces would again be fired.

As most great events begin with small first steps, the history of Tannehill begins in 1830 when Daniel Hillman, a part owner of a furnace in New Jersey, came to Alabama to build a forge along the banks of Roupes Creek, a tributary of the Cahaba River. He named it the Roupes Valley Ironworks, since by virtue of little competition, Hillman anticipated quick progress and growth. Hillman was right to think big, aware of the great irony that in the early decades of statehood, one could walk a few scant miles from the ridges of iron ore, limestone, and large beds of coal—perhaps nowhere else in the world do all the basic ingredients of iron-making lie so close together—and still find farmers plowing their fields with English-made iron instead of Alabama-made plows. Accounts in the *Jefferson Record* explained that several local planters joined together to organize the forge after noticing immense deposits of brown hematite ore in Roupes Valley: "The company got Hillman of New Jersey and erected a little furnace on a bold stream which runs across Roupes Valley and flows into Shades Creek. Here a large hammer propelled by water hammered out the best kind of tough metal and supplied the counties for some distance around with plows, horseshoes, and hollow ware." Soon, inhabitants of the valley would no longer send to England for their iron goods.

The forge, fired by charcoal made from brown ore and wood cut in the surrounding forests, created an inexpensive iron that sold for 10 cents a pound. By comparison, sugar cost 15 cents a pound and coffee 40 cents. The problem of transportation limited Hillman in the early days since it was 35 miles by ox cart to the state capital, Tuscaloosa, over poor roads often impossible in bad weather. Finding and keeping skilled labor was also an issue, but for his persistence, Hillman earned the moniker, "the founder of the iron trade in Alabama."

Hillman died before he made his fortune, and in 1836 a cotton planter, Ninian Tannehill, acquired the forge as a sideline to his farm and livestock business. In the coming decades, many different owners would run the forge but Tannehill's name stuck fast. When in 1859, Moses Stroup, who later built Jefferson County's first furnace, Oxmoor, oversaw the construction of a blast furnace, Tannehill entered a new era. Still, Stroup's venture was not without obstacles as well. According to a letter Stroup wrote in 1859, "the difficulty in getting men of capital to come here from the North is you cannot get them to believe what we say about this country and they won't believe it is healthy here." But by June of 1860, census records show 490,000 pounds of iron ore were consumed along with large amounts of limestone and coal to make 10 tons of iron and 10 tons of castings. The works employed 40 workers with a monthly payroll of \$1,040. Stroup was one of the top ironmakers of the day.

Much of the work was done by slaves, especially the construction of the first furnace stack. Slaves carved sandstone blocks from a nearby quarry, moving stones often weighing more than 400 pounds and built the 30-foot high stack that still stands today. Machinery came from Philadelphia, firebrick lining the furnace may have come from as far away as England. A newly-constructed wooden trestle connecting the hillside to the furnace enabled workers to charge the furnace from the top. As the surrounding buildings and machinery went up, furnaces number two and three followed, further tribute to the work of skilled slave artisans who also dug the brown hematite ore.

In 1862 William L. Sanders bought the operation and immediately began expanding the ironworks after

securing Confederate bonds until it produced 20 tons a day during the Civil War. Tannehill became an industrial giant, spewing out pig iron for the Selma Arsenal where one-half of the cannon and two-thirds of the fixed ammunition used by the South during the last two years of the war was made. According to Ethel Armes' *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (1910), some 3,400 acres of timber were cut for charcoal during the lifetime of the furnaces, a large part of that coming during the war. The woods surrounding Tannehill Ironworks became a landscape of tree stumps. But for all its success, labor and transportation difficulties

remained, as did the issue of securing food supplies for both the workers and the horses, oxen, and mules—no mean task during the war. While the war effort certainly spurred industrial development in Alabama and the South, as the Confederacy's credit weakened when the war turned sour, inflation drove the price of iron from \$17.40 a ton in 1860 to nearly \$500 a ton.

When the end came for the ironworks in March 1865, it was no real surprise that Federal strategists focused their sights on Alabama: during the latter years of the war, the state's many furnaces combined to produce





# Making Iron in the Cahaba River Valley



Photo by Beth Maynor Young.

70% of the Confederacy's iron, more than all other Southern states combined. Wilson's Raiders effectively destroyed Alabama's iron industry. Several abortive attempts were made to rebuild Tannehill, but even by the war's end, Tannehill's age-old design was already showing signs of obsolescence, a stone-jacketed Roman-style furnace in a world of superior iron-shelled furnaces. By the latter part of the century, the site was largely deserted, its legacy nearly forgotten save for the few day-trippers that continued to visit the overgrown ruins.

As the public gradually became aware of the tremendous legacy of Tannehill, in 1969 the Alabama Legislature declared the site a state memorial park. Today, Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park contains more than 1,500 acres for hiking, camping, recreation, and above all, the preservation of Alabama's 19th century iron industry and its relics. In restored pioneer buildings, craftsmen demonstrate their trade while a cotton gin, pioneer farm, a working gristmill, and blacksmith shop reveal a bygone way of life. An Iron and Steel Museum

documents the region's industrial history, while the restored stone furnaces are displayed in all their glory. It has become one of Alabama's most popular tourist attractions. And in a 1976 bicentennial project, Tannehill Furnace No. 1 blasted once again, producing more than two and a half tons of pig iron for a crowd of 15,000 on hand for the refiring ceremony. For the first time in American history, an iron furnace that had not run in a century was put back into operation, giving clear recognition to the role Tannehill Furnaces played in both Alabama and American history.



# From BLAST

It took a war to wake the Cahaba River Valley to the future.

When some of the first systematic underground coal mining in Alabama began in 1856 near Montevallo, it was well known that both the Warrior and Cahaba River basins contained vast coal deposits. Ten years earlier Sir Charles Lyell, an English geologist, noted the region's abundant mineral wealth of iron ore, limestone, and coal lying in such proximity to each other. In the late 1850's, another Englishman, Joseph Squire, began exploring and mapping Alabama's coalfields with the trained vision of an engineer, one eye set on the ground, the other looking toward the future. But the Confederacy, a society built upon its very refusal to develop industry, would come to realize too late its dependence upon a nascent iron industry that could not possibly supply the nation's war needs.

Little more than a decade after the Civil War destroyed Alabama's economy, a city called Birmingham, built upon steel, would rise at the headwaters of the Cahaba River and redirect the state's economy, effectively waking the region to the Industrial Age. The river that spawned the failed first capital would also provide the means for the growth of the "Magic City" that would so transform life in Alabama during the coming years.

At the beginning of the Civil war, Alabama had six blast furnaces and was called with good reason, the "Arsenal of the Confederacy." Heavy square stone structures built like pyramids, the furnaces ranged from 29 to 50 feet high and in fact shared more with furnaces built by Romans than by anything built today. During the last two years of the war, Alabama furnaces produced more iron than all other Southern states combined, nearly 70% of the South's iron supply. By 1865 in a major building effort, the state's iron industry grew to 19 furnaces spread south and east of Elyton where the new city of Birmingham would soon develop.

Though railroads slowly began eclipsing waterways as primary means of transportation, early iron furnaces still depended on water power, the proximity of ore beds, and stands of timber for charcoal. With its high quality 360 square mile coal field, the Cahaba basin met all three needs and furnaces were built at Tannehill (1859), Brierfield (1861), Little Cahaba, also

known as Brighthope (1863), Irondale (1863), and Oxmoor (1863) taking full advantage of the basin's mineral and water resources to produce pig iron. The first Alabama coal to compete commercially with Pennsylvania and English coal came from the Cahaba field in Shelby County. The Oxmoor furnace was located on the banks of Shades Creek, a tributary of the Cahaba, and the furnace at Irondale, also known as the Cahawba Ironworks was a scant 10 miles away to the northeast.

It was at Irondale in 1864 that the first successful coke iron was made in Alabama. Twelve years later at Oxmoor, coke was used to smelt iron, laying the foundation for the steel industry that would soon build Birmingham. When commercial coal mining began in earnest along the Cahaba, railroads developed to place these raw materials in the hands of industry. As Alabama's first capital withered at the foot of the Cahaba River, a new industrial giant rose at the river's head.



The ruins of Tannehill Furnace, a popular turn-of-the-century picnic spot.

A microcosm of that future could be seen in the Cahaba Iron Works in Irondale which produced pig iron for casting utensils and railroad parts. Destroyed by the Union cavalry forces of Wilson's Raiders in March 1865, it was the first blast furnace rebuilt after the war, resuming production in 1866 after Wallace S. McElwain found the necessary Northern capital to back his venture. Removed from any sizable population, the furnace lacked the necessities to support the large number of workers necessary to run the furnace. To remedy this, McElwain built a foundry, commissary, boarding house, corral, employee houses, and stables, making it the first company village in Jefferson County. It would not be the last.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, one way of life ended in the Black Belt cotton lands. The loss of slave labor led to the final collapse of a Confederate economy utterly dependent upon agriculture. With the advent of steel making, coal mines, mills, and iron ore came to dictate the direction the region's economic future would take, and all the while, the Cahaba River flowed through a landscape containing both remnants of Alabama's past and its future.

That the Cahaba River's course today remains relatively unchanged by man is as much a testament to history as it is to how ornery the little river can be. With its many snarls and twists, sandbars and shoals, it granted little quarter to steamboats attempting passage, though along with a few hardy others, the Cahaba River Packett navigated the river as far north as Centreville in the wet winter seasons before the Civil War. However, flatboats carrying cotton downstream were the norm. In the 1850's, the Cahaba had been bridged at Centreville and again near Cahawba to better facilitate toll traffic going to Selma. With Selma becoming Alabama's southern terminus for the railroad, river traffic lessened even further, though with the attention the Cahaba coal fields garnered, government engineers began eyeing the river as a potential artery for Birmingham's growing commerce interests. Congress authorized surveys in 1874 and 1880 estimating that the locks and dams necessary to open the river from Shades Creek to Centreville would cost \$382,000, significantly more than anyone was willing to pay.

As an alternative, between 1883 and 1893, the federal government allocated \$45,000 to open the river south of Centreville for navigation. Snags were removed, and workers attempted to cut through gravel and soft rock to free a channel at least three feet deep in low water. The efforts were largely unsuccessful, but the problem lay elsewhere: above Centreville, where the river runs lowest during the dry seasons, the issue was not so much the river's hindrance to navigation but that the ore and the iron produced was in the Upper

Alabama  
18



Photo courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History.



# FURNACES *to* STEEL MILLS

Cahaba where railroads easily dominated the river for commerce. If the river could have been damned up, locks installed and its course deepened for heavy traffic, the Cahaba still would have been eclipsed by the new rivers of commerce, the rails. When two railroads crossed the river 10 and 22 miles above Cahawba, towns along the river dried up. River commerce ended. For anyone interested in the plight of the Cahaba, thank the railroads for its survival as a relatively intact river system.

As the furnaces rose in Birmingham, so did the noise and smoke fumes people wished to escape, if only for the weekend. It became a custom to get away to the country, taking to the hills, or traveling to nearby springs and watering holes of the Cahaba basin such as Shades Creek, Lake Purdy, and of course the Cahaba itself at spots like Caldwell's Mill. Dr. Henry Edmonds, pastor of Birmingham's Independent Presbyterian Church from 1915 to 1942, had a small cabin on the Little Cahaba River where he would spend summers writing sermons and enjoying the river he called "a picture of God's life in the world and of His heaven thereafter." Cabins and summer homes sprang up along the quiet banks providing a much-needed escape from the heat and smells of the city. Whether it was cane pole fishing, an afternoon swim, or a trip across the river and up Oak Mountain on a Sunday school outing, the Cahaba served residents well. Perhaps too well.

During the first part of the century as mining techniques progressed, mines and mining towns sprang up in the river valley to exploit the coal for Birmingham and the nation's booming steel industry. No longer was transportation an obstacle to overcome. The primitive method of digging a seam until it filled with water had been surpassed by engineering methods that allowed miners to withdraw hundreds of tons of coal a day from a single mine. Emblematic of these islands unto themselves was the coal town of Piper. Springing into existence almost overnight around the turn of the century, it disappeared barely 50 years later as coal production plummeted in Alabama and the rest of the country. In the space of one generation, Piper boomed, made its mark, then silently vanished into history.

## Built by Coal: A Short History of Piper

If steel built Birmingham, then Piper rose through coal, and the coal that built the small town came from the 360 square-mile Cahaba Coal Field.

English geologist Joseph Squire, one of the first men to map the field, noted the rich deposits of the Montevallo Basin as early as 1859. Hired by early Birmingham industrialists such as Daniel Pratt, H. F. DeBardeleben, Truman H. Aldrich, and Colonel James W. Sloss, Squire explored the Cahaba field extensively in the 1860's and '70's. With the success of the Pratt Coal and Coke Company in 1878, the survival of the young town of Birmingham was assured, and the Cahaba Coal Company was founded in 1882 hoping to bank on the growing coal market. After constructing railroad connection between Blocton and Birmingham, the Cahaba Coal

Company grew to own over one million acres of prime coal land, making it one of the largest coal companies in the South.

In 1901, a new mine opened at Coleanor near Blocton, and the ever-entrepreneurial DeBardeleben formed the Little Cahaba Coal Company soon after, soliciting investment from Oliver Hazzard Perry Piper of Memphis to help open the nearby mine soon to bear his name. Twenty-four year-old Walter Henley was chosen to help build the new mining town of Piper, eventually becoming president of the Little Cahaba Coal Company. Henley's meteoric rise in many ways reflected the fortune of Birmingham itself: rapid progress. Starting as a bellhop at the Birmingham Trust National Bank in 1898, 27 years later Henley became the bank president.



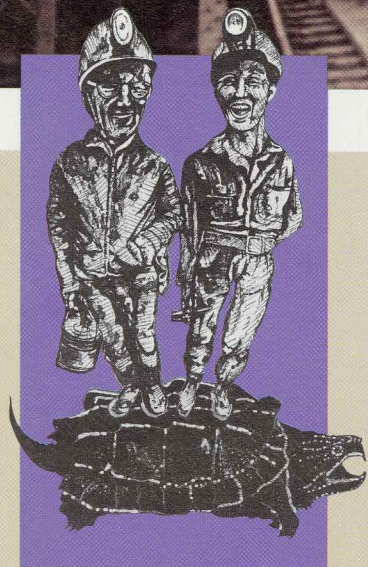
Two girls on the Cahaba near Piper, early 1900's.







Marvel Mine near Piper, 1908.



## Turtle Revenge

Everyone has a "fish story": the mammoth one that broke the line, the reel, maybe even the boat. The story of the one that got away remains the archetype to follow since, if the fish is gone, who can challenge the fisherman's details?

Will Harper's "fish story" may be a bit embellished, but the reptile itself did not get away.

Back in the 1920's, Mr. Harper, a Piper resident, and a few friends took their poles to the Cahaba River and were working the banks. Whether the fish were biting that day is not clear; however, snapping turtles clearly were. Big snapping turtles. With the help of the others, Mr. Harper managed to catch the absolute largest snapper any of them had ever seen. Visions of the ruckus they would cause back in town when they hauled this catch back filled their heads. Turtle soup suddenly became soup de jour for many a home.

With the aid of a logging chain, the men managed to secure the snapper to the front bumper of Mr. Harper's '26 Chevrolet. Two men at a time could stand on the back of the turtle. After their exertions and striking of conquering poses, the men found some shade near the bank to enjoy their packed lunches.

Not long into their meal, someone noticed movement and gave a shout. The car was slowly rolling down a slight grade toward the direction of the river. When they caught up with it (just in time, of course), they realized the giant reptile, eager to get back in the safety of the water, was tugging the car along with it.

Mr. Harper had enough adventure for one day. Taking an axe from his car, he raised the blade and hacked off the head of the beast. Case closed. An open and shut story. Almost.

While the men gathered their gear for the ride to Piper, Mr. Harper's prize coon hound, the one he shelled out \$250 for, was eager to meet the monster turtle's decapitated head. As the hound sniffed a bit too close to the mouth, the jaws opened up and snapped down on his head, killing him in a flash.

Will Harper lost an expensive hound and was understandably upset, but Piper and the surrounding area had quite a turtle story to chew on for years to come.

Piper's fortune rose almost as quickly as Birmingham's. Piper No. 2 mine was exceptional. With a seam height of 27 feet and a length of 10,000, it became the best producing mine in the area and its rooms and tunnels even ran below the Cahaba River itself. In fact, the high quality coal was so combustible, fires constantly erupted in the mine, ignited by charges of black powder used in blasting. At first, steam power ran everything in the town—shops, fans, hoisting engines, and pumps. After building a large steam-driven electric generator, homes and the mines had electricity. Two Methodist churches and one Baptist church, as well as another of both denominations for blacks were built.

As many as 500 homes constructed of rough-hewn timber cut at the company sawmill held a population of around 3,000. Rent was from five to ten dollars a month, deducted from the paper scrip wages miners received, the scrip of course being useless outside the company store. Many homes were painted green and red, the favorite colors of then-secretary and treasurer, Walter Henley, who oddly enough had an aversion to white. It is said he destroyed any plants in his yard with white blossoms.

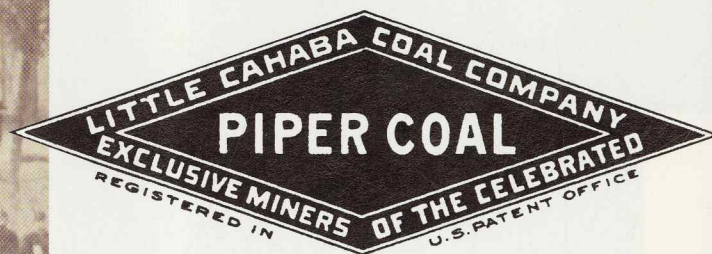


Piper football team, 1933.

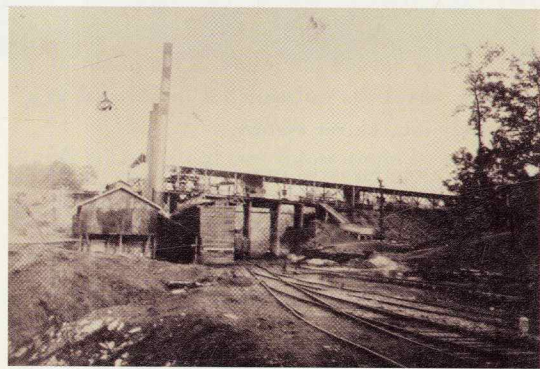
For both towns, the Cahaba River played a prominent role in local affairs. Besides providing abundant fishing and hunting grounds, a water source, and a perfect retreat during the warm months, it was unfortunately also a place to wash the dust off coal after machines sifted it down and separated the coal by size.

As water had been necessary to power early furnaces, waterways like the Cahaba and its tributaries now served to clean coal dust off newly-extracted deposits for easier transport. Whether washed by hand or through conveyors that could carry huge amounts of coal through the river and its tributaries until properly cleaned, this practice polluted the Cahaba with toxic heavy metal contaminants, coal dust, and created lower pH conditions downstream. According to Centreville residents living at the time, the dust was so prevalent it would often make the Cahaba run black for days. Even today, black seams of coal dust can be seen embedded in sand bars along the river, and if one looks carefully, small pieces of coal still dot the beaches of the Cahaba.

That life was difficult for coal miners and their families comes as no surprise. The paltry script wages tied them to the mining town while the unstable demand for coal meant frequent layoffs until demand picked up again. Coal dust in the mines often led to black lung, and methane gas explosions, fires, and rock falls were a constant threat. And all the while the superintendent



## PIPER, ALABAMA



Top House at Piper Mine #1.

and his men governed the town with formidable power consolidated in a few hands.

As the union movement grew in the 1920's, some miners in Piper went on strike for higher wages and, refusing to work, were kicked out of the company-owned houses they lived in. Tents were set up by the Miners' Union, but as winter approached, the miners could not buy food at the company store and the strike ended with little success.

After the Depression, laws allowing miners to belong to unions and negotiate with their employer were passed, but as late as 1934, the Little Cahaba Coal Company still refused to bargain. On February 20th of that year, the miners at Piper did not show up for work. When some miners tried to go back to work, the striking men set up pickets at the Cahaba River bridge to keep the strike breakers out. Armed men, among them Mike Self, a notoriously violent former sheriff, were called in by the company to break up the strike but were run out of town by an angry group from Piper. Somehow both parties avoided violence, but Governor Benjamin Miller called the National Guard. Negotiations began immediately.

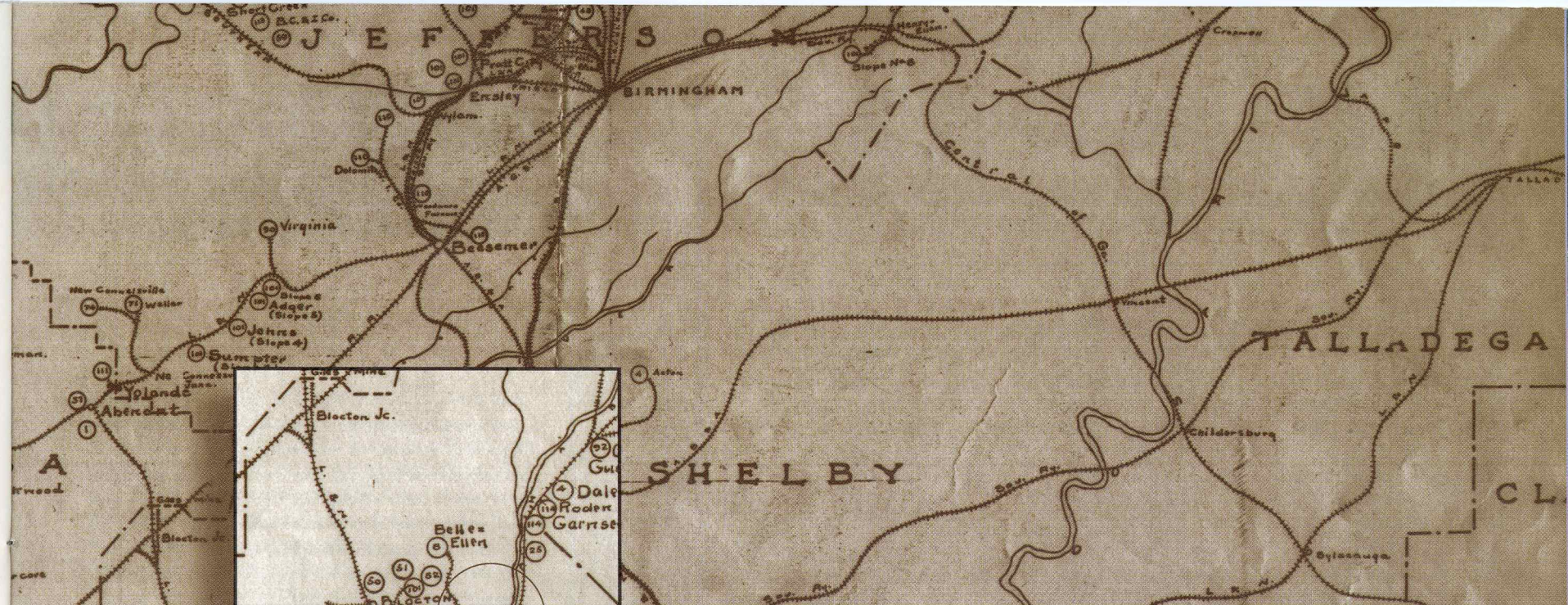
In one example of what the miners faced, B. L. Thompson, father of six, received a statement that his pay for the first half of February consisted of four dollars, in scrip. After working 11 days for \$37.50, he owed the company store more than just his soul: \$23 were owed for basic provisions, \$7.20 for company house rent, 90 cents for lamp rent, \$1.20 for the doctor's fees, 85 cents for school fees, and 20 cents for funeral flowers.

By the 11th day of the strike, more than 10,000 workers in Alabama mines had joined in the protest that began in Piper. National Guard units were dispersed to several towns by the governor. After three weeks of negotiations, on March 16th, an agreement signed in Birmingham marked a new beginning for the miners: workers would be paid semi-monthly in cash or by check and eight-hour days in a 40 hour week would become standard. Though the settlement was quite an achievement, the days of coal power were quickly being eclipsed by petroleum and natural gas. Soon the Piper mines began a countdown that would forever end a way of life beside the Cahaba River.

Labor prices were high, coal demand was down, and the mines went so deep that extracting the coal hardly paid for itself by the mid-1940's. In 1946 investors sold the Little Cahaba Coal Company, and though production soon began again under new management, it ceased to be profitable and stopped permanently by the early 1950's. Residents moved on, and the empty houses sold for \$100 a room to be demolished and reconstructed elsewhere. Nothing remains but black and white photographs and the memories of those who were there. Piper rose from coal, but only the coal endures.

Today, Piper is another Alabama ghost town—dirt roads that once led to churches, homes and schools now wind through a landscape overgrown with pine and hardwoods, vines and wildflowers. The Cahaba hills that flank the river are quiet. Time moves on. Even the company store is gone.





Railroad map of Birmingham and surrounding counties with enlarged area showing site of wreck.

## The Wreck of '96

**B**irmingham Mineral Railroad's train No. 41 left Birmingham at 6:30 a.m. Sunday morning, just two days after Christmas, 1896. When the entire train—engine, baggage car, and two passenger cars—crashed through the Cahaba River bridge near Blocton a short time later, falling 110 feet, killing 21 and injuring eight, it became one of the worst train disasters in Alabama history.

The bridge over the river was an impressive sight by all accounts. The abutments on each side were made of wood, and the bridge itself, some 450 feet long, was constructed entirely of iron. Only four years old, the structure had four huge pillars and had supported trains with full loads of coal since it was built. But for reasons still not clear, that morning the three cars and engine were too much weight.

A survivor made it to nearby Hargrove and notified the superintendent's office of Southern Railway in Birmingham of the accident. A summons went out to all available doctors in the city, and the relief train was soon underway. When the medical team arrived, they witnessed a gruesome scene.

Eyewitnesses told how survivors were forced to listen to the screams of those trapped in the burning cars, and the difficult task of gathering the dead. Other than the engineer, all the fatalities in No. 41 from Birmingham were cremated by the intense flames of the burning train.

Unintentionally furthering the tragedy, officials rushed a second relief train from Birmingham and collided with the first killing two and seriously injuring four rescue workers.

Legend has it that when hearing of the wreck, a conductor on the Louisiana and Nashville Railroad remembered a conversation he had with an engineer, Frank White, a few days before the disaster. White said he did not believe in visions but was troubled when, recently crossing the same Cahaba River bridge at night, he had seen a red light ahead in the darkness and quickly stopped the train only to find the light had disappeared. To him, it was a disquieting premonition. But for people living in the soon-to-be founded mining towns of Piper and Coleanor near the bridge, one only had to look in the river at low water to see metal wheels and frames of the railroad cars for an eerie reminder of the tragedy that had occurred.

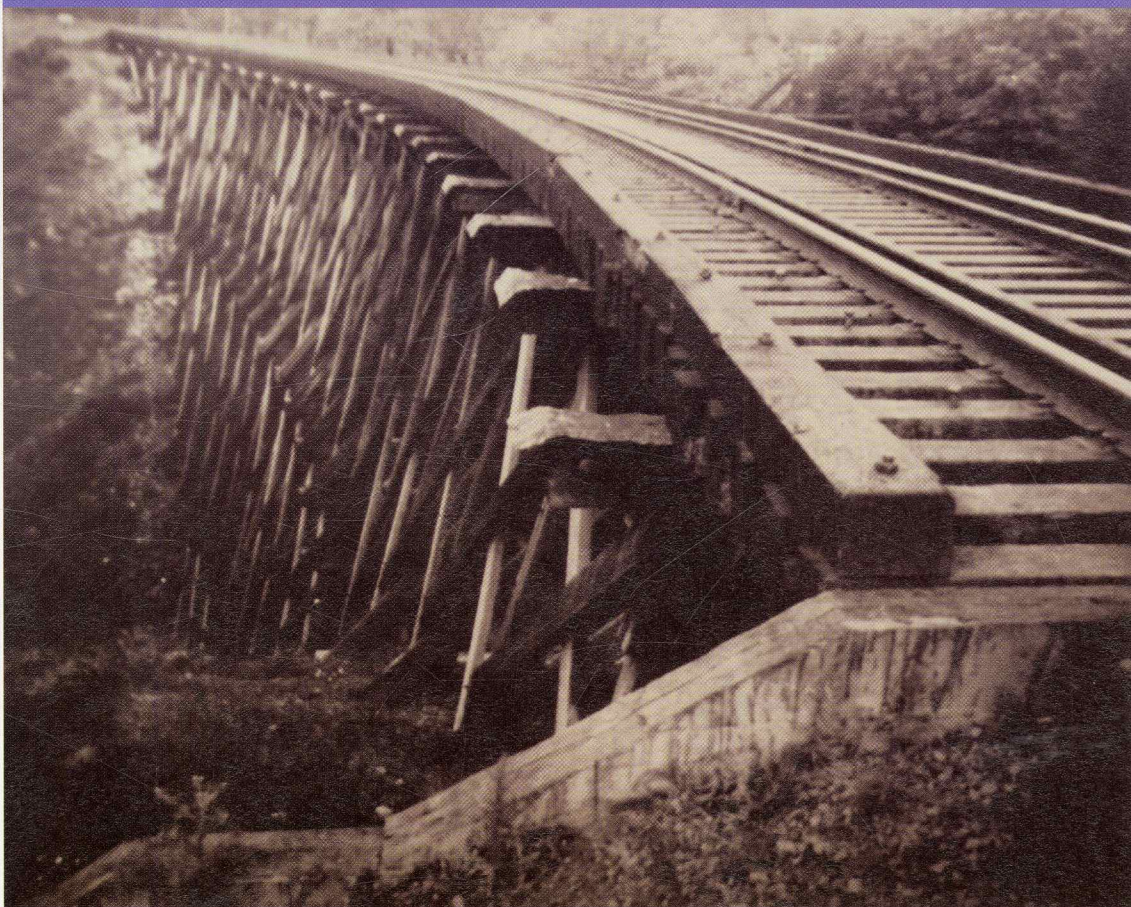
**B**y the 1930's and 40's, electricity was just one more rival for coal as a power source, and one by one other mines shared the same fate as Piper. To a small degree, the river may have partially healed over time once coal extraction slowed; however, as the population at the Cahaba's headwater boomed in the postwar years, increasing pressure on the river clearly began to strain the river's own natural ability to maintain itself.

During the last several decades, the Cahaba River has become demonstrably more polluted. Almost across the board, fish, mussel, and other plant and animal populations native to the river have begun a frightening decline. A recent study by the Alabama Geological Survey found a 20% to 40% decline in fish species in parts of the river. Some species have seen a decline as great as 75% in the past two decades. What is most alarming is that in the last one hundred years, half of all extinctions in North America have occurred in the Mobile river basin, and the Cahaba River is the geographic heart of that basin. Dispel any notions that this somewhat remote, isolated river is protected by its relatively secluded location: flowing through the heart of Alabama, the Cahaba River is at the forefront of a life and death biological struggle holding possibly disastrous consequences in its outcome.

At the same time, the Planning Departments for Jefferson County and the City of Birmingham estimate that presently undeveloped areas by the Cahaba River will see population increases from 153,000 in 1987 to 246,000 by the year 2010, an increase of 61%. Forecasts given by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expect even larger increases. For the strain a growing populace places on a river like the Cahaba, there appears little respite in the near future.

Starting in the late 1960's, a small number of individuals became alarmed at the attitude many took toward the Cahaba and our natural environment. The illegal release of raw sewage, the poor quality of the air at the time, unchecked development beside sensitive waterways, and a remarkable lack of any federal, much less state protection of our drinking sources was disturbing to say the least. Public perception of these many problems began to slowly change and develop. People took action to reverse the disastrous legacy we threatened to leave for the next generation. However, while the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972 may have helped some streams and rivers, it clearly did not affect the continuing degradation of the Cahaba's quality of water.

Where we find ourselves today is not at some crossroads where we can decide to face up or ignore the fact that there is a problem with monumental ramifications to the nearly one million Alabamians drawing water from this one small river: where we are today is on a journey that long ago reached the turning point. The crossroads, it seems, we passed in the night on this road we chose. Plant and animal species have vanished almost before we knew they were here in our backyard. Our own deeds threaten the water we drink. Today we must make the tough decisions that determine our path not for the next few years but for the coming decades, the coming centuries. What we can create in the present is a legacy for the future, a future that will include not only ourselves but our children and their children.





"WHEN THE WELL IS DRY, WE KNOW THE WORK"

# The Value of Water

We seldom think about water. Like electricity, cable TV, gasoline, and food, the constant availability of water is assumed to be a fact never questioned as long as the bills are paid. But when considering water as a resource, there are a few defining features that make this simple combination of hydrogen and oxygen quite novel. Beyond the occasional comet or small asteroid entering our atmosphere with the right mix of atoms, there will never be more, or for that matter, any "new" water on this planet. All we will ever have is trapped in the atmosphere, the ocean, lakes and streams, aquifers, and frozen in the polar ice caps and glaciers. Like some massive subsistence living experiment, the amount of water on the earth is a constant. This is a closed environment. The implications of the experiment are strikingly simple: the only aspect about water that changes, besides its form in the hydrologic cycle, is its quality. In a local sense and in a global sense, Alabama, the Cahaba River, and humankind get one chance.

When the first settlers arrived in present-day Alabama, they found a wealth of natural resources, chief of which may have been the abundance of water. Whether for drinking, cooking, farming, livestock, industry, or transportation, this plentiful supply of life's necessities was one early selling point for the region. Generated by soldiers with Andrew Jackson during the Indian wars, stories circulated throughout the country about the rich, fertile regions of Alabama with its plentiful springs, creeks, and rivers. The people who came to the area were not disappointed. Artesian wells dotted the streets of Alabama's early cities, and the only time water became an issue was when the rare specter of its absence threatened. But this is the way it has always been: the well water is cold, clean, and bottomless—until some near catastrophe reminds us of its worth.

As Alabama's population began to increase, the town well or spring could often no longer supply the amount of water needed to meet demand. As cities grew, it became clear that an organization was necessary to ensure that each town's needs were met. In Montgomery, groundwater is so plentiful that numerous artesian wells served the city's needs until the last few decades when pumps began drawing from the Tallapoosa River. Today, about 60% of the capital city's water comes from the river, 40% from the deep wells. "In the early days, God and nature were doing the processing, bringing up water through the rocks and sand until it was pure," begins Buddy Morgan, General Manager of the Water Works and Sanitary Sewer Board of Montgomery. "But as we began to contaminate our sources and over-utilize, we lost that ability to have a natural filtration process, so early settlers moved on. They went to where the water was. Just look at the development of our cities: Cahawba, Decatur, Muscle Shoals, Selma, Montgomery, Mobile."

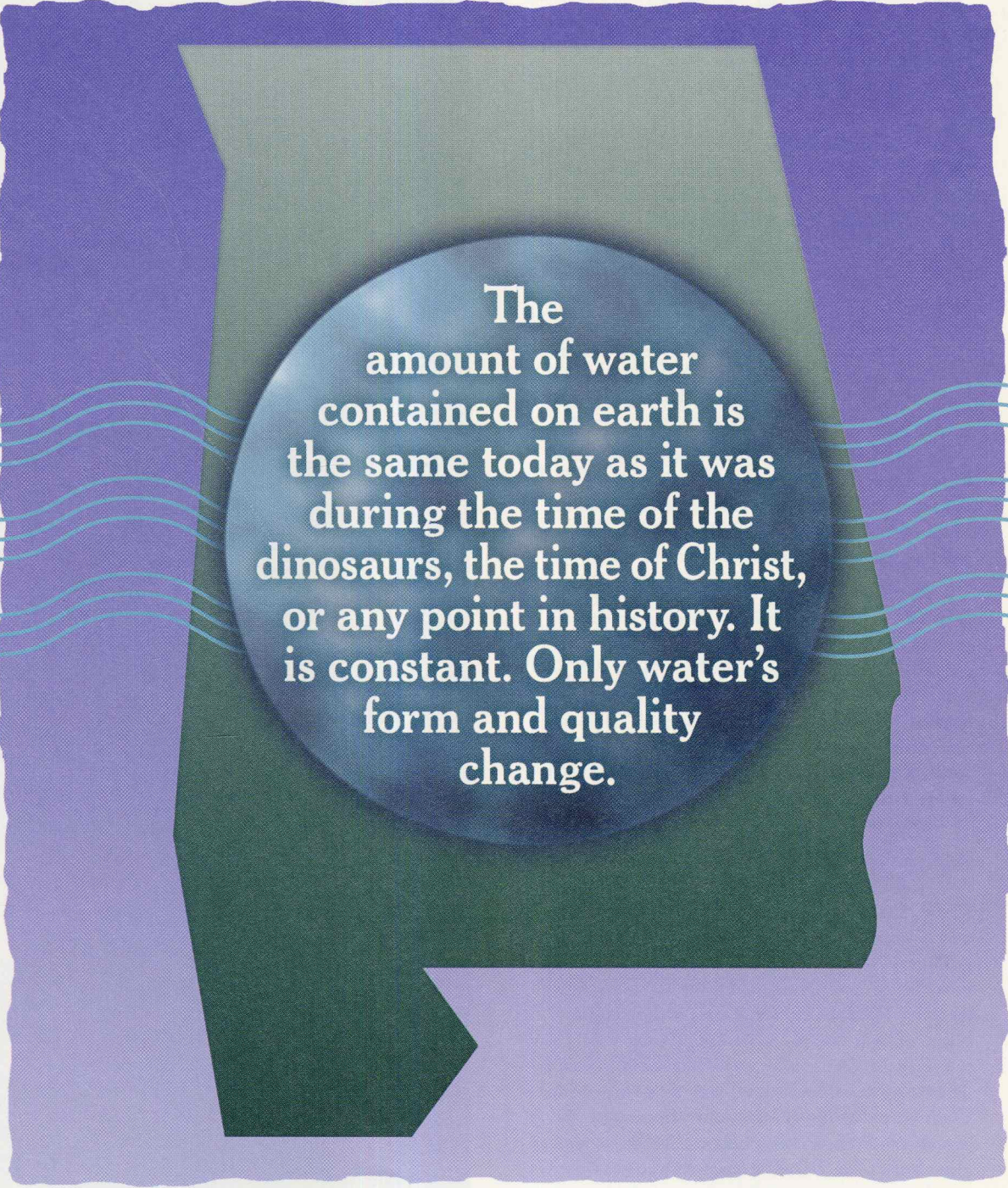
As the cities grew, those that came and stayed in Montgomery organized the Montgomery Water Company in 1850, and by the turn of the century, the city was controlling water resources. With deep, 1,000 foot aquifers feeding nearly all of the city's needs cheaply and cleanly, Montgomery has until recently been extremely fortunate. But if not managed carefully, according to Morgan, this could change. "One of our major concerns is the aquifers we feed from and their ability to recharge," he says. "If we pull too much from them, as you lower the water table the potential for drawing contaminants down into the aquifers and the potential for bringing saline water up increases. You have to be real careful how you balance these things because it is something we don't want to mess up." With few contaminants, little treatment and no settling necessary, aquifers are the least expensive source of water for communities in South Alabama. And

aquifers are a more abundant source of water than all the water in all the lakes and rivers in the world.

When examined by region, Alabama presents a varied picture of water allocation. And despite the state's overall surplus of surface water, the location of that water distribution influences the portrait of how different communities use different water resources for their needs. In Northeast Alabama, the groundwater that Montgomery and other areas of the Gulf Coastal Plain enjoy in such relative plenty is almost absent. "In the Piedmont area of Northeast Alabama, a lot of limestone and other rock formations mean little groundwater: water is there one day and gone tomorrow," Morgan explains. "So they have a real problem drilling wells to get a good source of water and are primarily looking to surface water for their needs. The northwest part of the state has a lot of surface water but poor quality groundwater. In the Coastal Plain, you have an abundance of good aquifers through here, but once you get down into the lower reaches, you have more salt water intrusion as

river water is too contaminated for industrial use, much less human consumption, the cost of supplying clean drinking water is difficult to even calculate. Regardless of where you are, clean water holds value for both residential and industrial uses. In order to attract businesses to the state, a primary selling point is a reliable, healthy source of water. This has not changed. Modern life is not so advanced that we can escape the most basic of needs.

Part of understanding the value of water is understanding what life without clean water would be like. In developing countries, some 1.2 billion people do not have access to a safe, reliable water supply and have to use bodies of water such as shallow wells and stagnant pools that are easily contaminated. It is no surprise that waterborne diseases then account for an estimated 80% of all illnesses in such countries. More close to home, in 1873 the previously booming town of Birmingham suffered a cholera epidemic that nearly destroyed the town, not only from the illness itself but from the knowledge that



The amount of water contained on earth is the same today as it was during the time of the dinosaurs, the time of Christ, or any point in history. It is constant. Only water's form and quality change.

you get nearer to the coast." Depending on where one lives, the availability and sources differ greatly. But even if we consider water a free resource, the expense necessary to generate it, purify it, and transport it to hundreds of thousands of taps all over the state clearly is not.

While Morgan manages some 1,000 miles of water and sewer mains, three water plants, three wastewater plants, 45 deep wells, 50 sewage pump stations, and numerous other components in the Montgomery system, he estimates his infrastructure needs right now would require \$400 million just to maintain the current system properly. This does not even include future maintenance. Water is not free even when it is abundant. In a country like Poland, where more than three-quarters of the nation's

contaminated wells threatened the city's water supply. Although 120 people died, the town slowly recovered. Once the proverbial well appeared in danger of drying up, the organization of a comprehensive plan to secure safe and reliable water to foster the city's growth quickly became a priority for those staying in the new boom town. Significantly, the city's ability to survive depended largely on the Cahaba River as a dependable source of clean drinking water and a resource for industrial uses. It remains the same today.

"If people are never told the value of a resource," says Morgan, "if they are never told what they are doing to mess it up, then how can they ever change? And I say 'we' as an industry and 'we' as the public have been blindly plodding along down this road not understanding what we are doing



# TH OF WATER." BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

to our water." Often the public tends to view calls to conserve water, recycle, or protect wetlands and river systems as somewhat idealistic, far-fetched notions that do not apply to their situations. They are deemed impractical and perhaps illusory at best. Yet no one planning to construct a tall office building would suggest there is no need to be sure the foundation will support the weight of 20 or 30 floors. Planning future growth and development with a measured thought toward the allocation of scarce water supplies and the potential dangers that may imperil water quality is imperative to our future.

When speaking to groups about similar issues, Buddy Morgan has a routine down pat. "I pick up a glass of clean water and say to everybody, 'Look at this. It's nice to turn on the tap and be able to drink this, but there is going to come a point in time when what's in this glass will be as valuable as an ounce of gold because of what we are doing and what we fail to continually try to do which is improve water quality.' The public thinks we can clean it all up, but there are some contaminants out there that we just can't take out of water. What we have to do, then, is simple and at the same time, difficult: limit the introduction of contaminants into our bodies of water."

Ultimately, many of the contaminants Morgan warns about do not come from the easily targeted sources such as industrial or untreated wastewater discharges. Stormwater contaminants are on the increase—not just in and around Montgomery—but throughout the state, including the Cahaba River. These nonpoint sources of pollution, pollution that cannot be traced to one particular source, are a continuing threat to clean drinking water. As we build more homes, roads, and parking lots, fertilizers, pesticides, toxic heavy metals, petroleum products, detergents, and even wood preservatives have less watershed available to absorb runoff during heavy rains. The result means such pollutants rush directly into our streams and rivers without the chance to be naturally filtered out of the stormwater.

The problem is compounded in proportion to the population base. A quarter of a million people in Montgomery means that many more nonpoint pollution sources. Birmingham and surrounding suburbs, with some four or five times that number of residents, further intensifies the pressure natural systems are forced to bear. Still, at some point, calling the pollution sources nonpoint—that is, specific to one origin—is deceptive. The source is all of us and our habits and our lifestyles. And with one-quarter of Alabama's population depending on the Cahaba River as a drinking source, habits need re-examining.

## SOME OF THE MANY WAYS WATER QUALITY AND AQUATIC HABITAT ARE DAMAGED.

- Littering.
- The improper use of lawn, crop, and garden chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides.
- Disposing of old paint, used oil, and other chemicals by pouring them into the gutter, down the storm drain, or out in the yard.
- Illegal dumping of industrial/commercial chemicals.
- Improperly maintained septic tanks.
- An increase of paved areas.
- Oil, antifreeze, and gas leaks from automobiles.
- Inadequately treated sewage.
- Channelized and concrete-lined drainageways.
- The destruction of wetlands.
- The improper containment and disposal of animal waste.
- Overgrazing pasture lands.
- Allowing livestock to enter creeks and ponds.
- Allowing sediment to erode from construction, farming, and tree harvesting.



Map of 1925 Olmsted Brothers proposal for a system of parks in Birmingham with Village Creek highlighted.

## A Short History of Village Creek

*For what it was and what it has been allowed to become, Village Creek is a striking example of opportunities lost and a heritage betrayed.*

It was a gem. Fed by limestone springs, Village Creek was one of four major creeks in Jones Valley, the 3-mile wide rift between Red Mountain and the hills of the Cumberland Plateau. The valley was a pleasant, fertile place of farms and small homes during the early days of statehood. Had large, potentially valuable tracts of coal not been discovered amid the streams and creeks that watered the settlers' fields of cotton, corn, wheat, oats, and rye, all this may have remained the isolated valley of small farms it once was.

As the industrial city of Birmingham grew, a string of new furnaces built in the 1880's went into blast requiring enormous amounts of water at nearly every stage of iron production. Reservoirs holding water pumped from Village Creek could not meet the demand, and by 1891 water diverted from Five Mile Creek and the Cahaba River helped supply the growing town's needs. But soon, even this reprieve granted to Village Creek was to end. Furnaces at Ensley, North Birmingham, Thomas, and other sites began to overwhelm the flow of the small creek.

While limestone, coal, and iron ore were the best known components of Birmingham's industrial miracle, expanding plants also required new water sources. Without more and more water to cool the boilers, the plants could not produce, regardless of how much raw material was at hand. The Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company estimated it needed 25,000 gallons of water for every ton of ore charged into one of its furnaces. By the early 20th century, TCI was using 400,000 gallons of water a day, more than 10 times the consumption of Birmingham's citizens. After the water was pulled from Village Creek for the mills, it was dumped back into the creek untreated. By this time, few thought of using Village Creek for the clean source of drinking water it once was. But there was further misery to come for those living along the afflicted creek's banks.

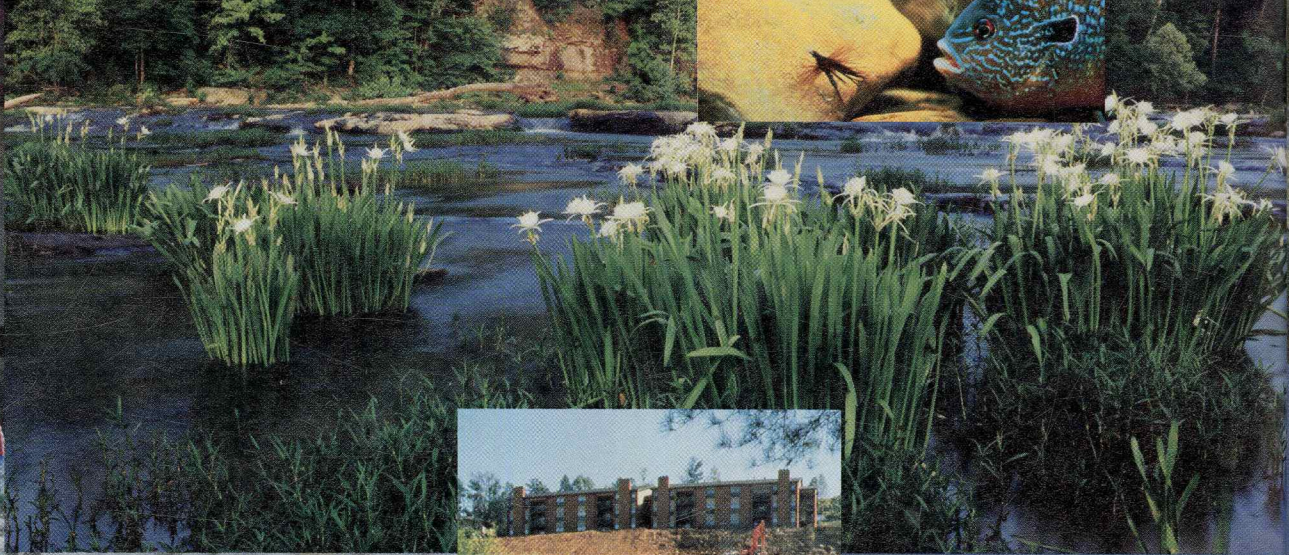
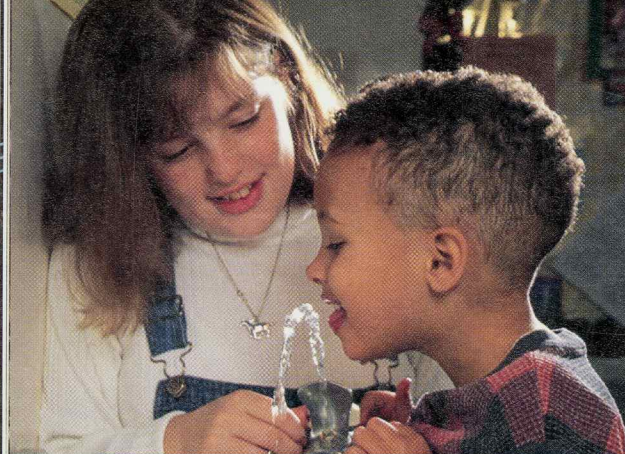
As Birmingham's population reached 200,000, it became clear that the blighted industrial district desperately needed help. A 1925 plan by the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm called for an extensive system of urban parks and boulevards of which Village Creek was to be a focal point. The plan called for recreational parks along the creek's floodplain, which, the firm argued, would provide a solution to the drainage area which increasingly suffered flooding. Property value was low and few residential or industrial developments existed in the proposed park area. But the city never implemented the Village Creek Park in the Olmsted Plan. In the coming years, hundreds of homes were built in the floodplain, and as the Olmsteds predicted, increased areas of pavement and development apparently led to more frequent and severe flooding, sometimes twice a year. In 1951 a flood in Ensley stranded 3,000 residents. By the 1970's, estimated annual property losses exceeded \$2.4 million. It should surprise no one that the property values are lower in the floodplain than in adjacent areas, and those who suffer from Village Creek's manmade excesses are largely African-American. Ironically enough, some currently proposed greenways to be established along Village Creek to help ease the flooding are similar to those the Olmsted Brothers recommended in 1925.

"Historically, the creek was conceived as part of the Olmsteds' continuous linear park for Birmingham, the same master plan that gave us Linn and Forest Park," explains William Gilchrist, Director of the Department of Planning, Engineering, and Permits for the City of Birmingham. "The Village Creek park was not adopted, and one can't escape that one of the reasons was that the idea of a linear park flew in the face of the idea of segregated neighborhoods. It was a missed opportunity, environmentally and socially." Speaking of plans that address some of these missed opportunities, Gilchrist sees a new chance for the beleaguered creek and its residents. "On a more hopeful note," he says, "we are looking at reclaiming the promise of Village Creek, so that in the longterm, the creek should be recognized as a public amenity for the environmental and recreational uses it has to offer."

To this end, the City of Birmingham recently secured \$3.75 million in funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and will match \$1.25 million to relocate approximately 150 to 180 houses in Ensley, South Pratt, and Woodlawn built in the floodplain. A volunteer citizens' group, the Ensley/Moro Park/South Pratt Distressed Flood Victims Coalition, has been instrumental in getting local, state, and federal government support for the application. Dr. Mable B. Anderson, Chair of the Coalition, explains how the group began. "It was a long, hard process, but we knew we had to bring people's attention to the problem ourselves to relieve some of the pain and suffering of those living along Village Creek," says Anderson. "That's how the Coalition got started." And though the FEMA funding marks a major victory for the young group, Anderson is quick to point out that while the grassroots organization has been successful working with the city, this is only the beginning. "We look forward to getting funding for the 1,600 other homes still in the floodplain, to cleaning up the creek, and working closely with the greenways project to see that our history remains intact even though many will be leaving the area," she says. "We hope to see something beautiful grow out of all this work."

Village Creek's 40-mile course is largely the same today as it was when the first settlers arrived in Jones Valley, only now more than 100 years of industrial and residential development line the banks. Large expanses of cement direct the creek into culverts and channels along the creek's path from Huffman in eastern Jefferson County to where it joins the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River. The contrast between what Village Creek was and what it is today is alarming: a community resource giving clean water to both residents and industry alike has become an environmental nightmare that has plagued those living along the waterway with 70 unrelenting years of polluted floods. Where residents in the 19th century actively sought out the creek for fishing, swimming, and picking berries along its banks, today it is the creek that comes to them in the form of floodwaters that damage their homes and health. No creek or river so near to a large metropolitan area can be expected to be pristine, but one would hope those living along Village Creek could expect, if not perfection, something measurably better than the legacy they have inherited.





The

STRUGGLE

Cahaba

for

The public's attitude toward environmental preservation has shifted dramatically in the last 20 to 30 years; however, the often laborious, incremental struggle for environmental justice was and continues today to often resemble attrition more than advancement, trial rather than progress. Whether trying to secure the Cahaba River federal protection under the National Wild and Scenic River System in the early 1970's or attempting to mediate between diverse interests in the '90's to prevent illegal sewage bypassing into the Cahaba and Black Warrior rivers in Jefferson County, change can come dripping slow. Few have taken such a message more to heart through hard lessons learned than the individuals involved in the decades-long struggle to further the cause of a clean, healthy Cahaba River for all Alabamians.

Those who came first must have felt like they were truly in the wilderness. At the time, divisions between environmentalists and businesses abounded. While this relationship has changed in the intervening years, at the time, Birmingham was tenaciously, even stubbornly hanging on to its industrial past. Like a determined Huck Finn or an ingenuous Jim adrift on a river big beyond their imagining, the pioneers of Cahaba preservation could not have known exactly what they were getting into. But into it they went, just the same.

When the first efforts began, the warnings often went unheeded. It was a case of individuals being ahead of society. But after the Clean Water Act of 1972 passed, there was a law with moral implications which these individuals could use to rally public opinion and organize on a local level. Anyone at all familiar with the Cahaba already knew it was a resource well worth protecting whether for recreational pursuits, as source of clean water for one million Alabamians, or for the many industrial uses the river supports. The idea, the emergent philosophy that we had an obligation to protect such natural resources for both their intrinsic values and for our own health and well being had now been expressed at the highest level of the American legal system. As an organization devoted to the protection, preservation, and promotion of the Cahaba River, the societal, philosophical, and legal groundwork for the establishment of the Cahaba River Society was now being set. It was just a matter of time and hard work.

Over the past decades, many people worked for the sake of this river and the health of those who use it as their water supply. The following list of individuals is hardly a comprehensive inventory of those pivotal many who gave their time, money, and best intentions for the sake of bettering the health of the Cahaba River. But they are at the core of Cahaba preservation, past, present, and future.

Ask me what we didn't do," says **Mary Burks** with a laugh when asked about her early efforts at environmental preservation in the mid-1960's. "We were wet behind the ears, eager people that didn't know just how hard it would be to get anything done." Perhaps best known for her successful effort to establish the Sipsey Wilderness Area within Bankhead National Forest, Mrs. Burks has vivid memories of her tenure as founder and Executive Director of The Alabama Conservancy from 1967-77. "The Conservancy was the first group to do anything to try and preserve the Cahaba. We had the first bill introduced in Congress to protect the Cahaba, along with the West Fork of the Sipsey Fork of the Black Warrior River. We fought desperately hard for the Cahaba but

could never overcome big, big business interests. They fought it to a standstill. Imagine, it took us 15 years just to get the upper one-third of the West Fork, 24 miles or so, protected." To this day, this short stretch of river remains the only federally protected waterway in Alabama.

While Mrs. Burks may not have secured federal protection for the Cahaba, she began amassing what eventually became 18,000 signatures on a petition to include the river as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System. When the chance came to petition to have the Cahaba included in the Wild and Scenic system, Mrs. Burks managed to have such a bill introduced on the floor of the House and Senate in Washington and eventually testified on the Cahaba's behalf. After the Department of the Interior recommended the river be placed on an inactive list, the "kiss of death" in effect, Mrs. Burks pulled some strings to keep it alive and have a study done on the Cahaba. Unfortunately, the Department of the Interior simply passed the study to the U.S. Forest Service. When the Forest Service deemed the river unsuitable for the Wild and Scenic system, that was that. Though the Cahaba was ultimately not included in the system, Mrs. Burks' efforts helped start the momentum for Cahaba preservation by arousing public support of the river both in Alabama and beyond.

With a background as a newspaper reporter, Mrs. Burks' work as an activist seemed to evolve and deepen as she followed her lifelong interest in nature. A native of Birmingham, she remembers growing up in a city second only to Gary, Indiana in terms of air particulate pollution. "You could stand under Vulcan on Red Mountain, and you couldn't see the city. It wasn't fog. It was a dirty, filthy smog, pollution. A few toxic fish kills, and one becomes aware of what's going on. Everybody just woke up and realized it's what we need to do." A strange amalgam of frustration mingles with a sense of accomplishment in Mary Burks, "Mother of the Sipsey." When she talks about her efforts with The Alabama Conservancy, she is understandably proud of her pioneering achievements in preservation in Alabama. But when discussion turns to the Cahaba River, a touch of regret occasionally comes to the surface. "People don't realize how desperately hard people can work on something before anything happens."

One person who intimately understands such exasperation is **Weesie Smith**. She describes herself as someone with a "deep appreciation of Alabama's natural resources and also deeply upset at what we've done with them." Mrs. Smith was instrumental in turning public attention to the issues of wastewater management in the early 1970's. Again, the path to involvement was made up of a few good-intentioned baby steps. "You could see what was happening. At that time, there were plans to develop to the utmost areas adjacent to the Cahaba River. There were plans for a sewer line from Trussville to Riverchase. Illegal dumping of untreated sewage was happening at night. It was just on and on and on. No one seemed to care. We just did our best - it wasn't enough - but we tried."

A granddaughter of Robert Jemison, Jr., an early Birmingham developer who valued sound land use planning, Mrs. Smith seems to have inherited a sense for long-term thinking. Instead of viewing the Cahaba's role concerning the city as that of one

long sewer to be used until destroyed, she asked perceptive, challenging questions that ran very much against the grain of city planners and the business community: How do you use a river without decimating it? What are our alternatives? What is the future of sewage management in relation to the Cahaba? While such queries

may seem commonplace, rational, and at the most basic level, necessary, at the time they made Mrs. Smith something of a pariah. Guy Arello, who became involved in Cahaba preservation at the time, offers an opinion of Weesie Smith. "She is the most sensible person you can meet, but back then if you weren't broad-minded enough to see the river as more than just a sewage ditch, you didn't see Weesie in those terms. The irony, of course, is that she was thinking in visionary terms, planning for the future, yet to people with tunnel-vision who see unchecked development as the only way to make money she was seen as some kind of radical environmentalist. But who really was the radical here? Weesie just questioned policy."

One of her first actions was simple enough. It was to become the signature Weesie Smith approach: know the rules, the regulations, and the laws so that you can clearly identify when they are being broken. When Mrs. Smith saw water pipes being installed running south on Highway 280, she checked the charter of the Birmingham Water Works Board. The charge of the charter was clear and specific: the Water Works was to supply water to Birmingham residents and adjacent areas of Jefferson County. Why, then, was water going to Shelby County when many in Jefferson County were desperate for water? The Board was violating its charter, and Mrs. Smith made this known. "It started a ruckus," she says, "and kind of opened things up, even though in the end, the water still went to Shelby County." But as the public's perception of the multitude of environmental problems facing the community changed and the Clean Water Act of 1972 passed, people now had more means with which to improve water quality standards. Looking back on her involvement, Mrs. Smith is plain spoken and matter-of-fact. "We just had a new way of looking at things."

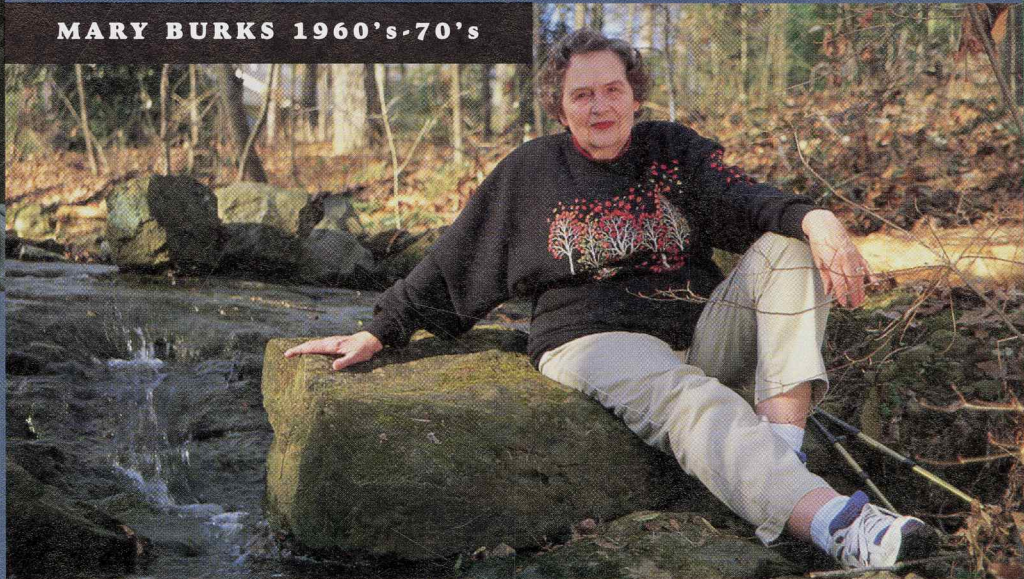
After the U.S. Forest Service announced in 1977 that they would not recommend the Cahaba River for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, **John Randolph** and other individuals formed The Cahaba Citizen's Study to try and reverse the Forest Service's decision. The study pulled together noted biologists, botanists, geologist, authors, and others who gathered data to refute the river's exclusion. This science-based approach used fact not fear or exaggeration to forward the cause of the Cahaba, and such a method would quickly become the basis for future studies. As Executive Director of The Alabama Conservancy from 1977-79, Randolph took a special interest in the Cahaba, and his attempt to influence the decision against inclusion of the Cahaba was an uphill, daunting task from the beginning. "We gathered petitions, had large Cahaba rallies but the study had no effect on the Forest Service," laments Randolph. "The whole Cahaba preservation effort just collapsed right then and there."

Indeed, the picture was not encouraging. In 1971, a bill to create an Alabama System of Wild and Scenic Rivers failed to pass. Two years later, Shelby County Rep. Tom Stubbs introduced a bill aimed specifically at protecting the Cahaba that passed the House of Representatives, but the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce's lobbying



# PRESERVATION

MARY BURKS 1960's-70's



"The Conservancy was the first group to do anything to try and preserve the Cahaba. We had the first bill introduced in Congress to protect the Cahaba, along with the West Fork of the Sipsey Fork of the Black Warrior River. We fought desperately hard for the Cahaba but could never overcome big, big business interests."

# RIVER

killed it in the Senate during the last three days of the session. As recently as 1976 an "Act to Save the Cahaba" died a quick death soon after its introduction. Again in 1977 a bill modeled after Tennessee legislation for a State Scenic River system failed. The pattern became painfully predictable.

"Well, I failed," Randolph says with a laugh, joking about an effort that was anything but a failure. Though the dedicated few who prepared the study did not meet with success in that regard, as time has revealed, the Wild and Scenic System itself was perhaps the wrong tool from the start. With political forces so in favor of industry at the time, for the most part, only rivers within federal lands could be protected under the system as it was set up. The frustration Randolph met with had much to do with a political reality that lagged far behind the ideal he and others were seeking. While 20 years spans just a blink in time in terms of societal change, it can be a lifetime for those individuals involved in trying to make such change a reality. John Randolph's legacy is that he began to harness the energy and enthusiasm of the many individuals for whom Cahaba preservation was the ideal they sought to make reality.

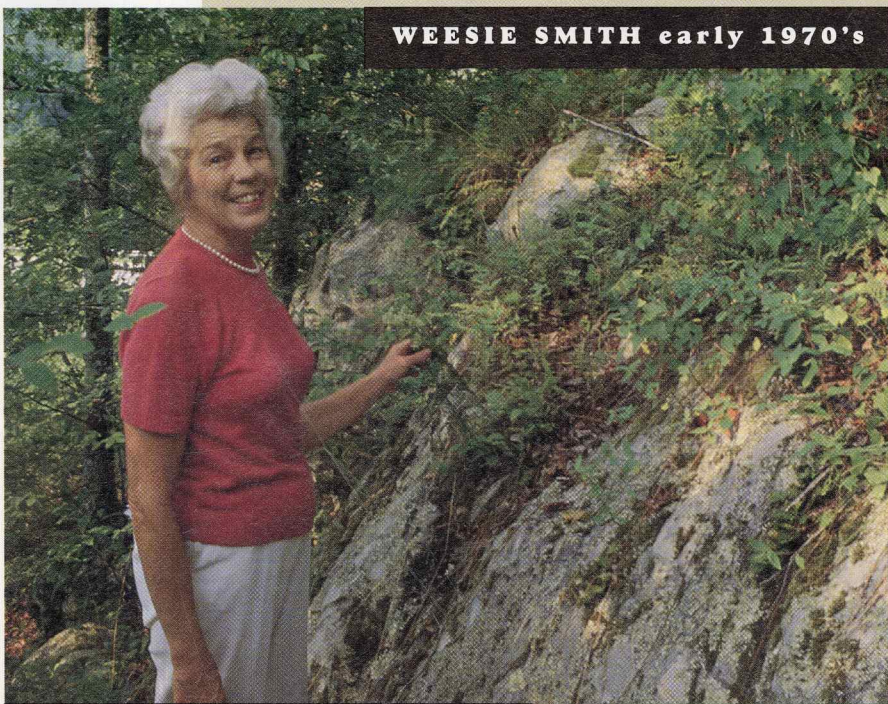
"Frankly, the national protection of the Cahaba River was doomed from the start," says Randolph. "Only a powerful and dedicated member of our Washington legislative delegation could have hoped to succeed. But I certainly don't regret the effort. The publicity, the attention we focused on the river, and the public support were all just one more step leading to the creation of the Cahaba River Society."

As the cause of environmental preservation gathered steam in Alabama, more individuals began looking specifically at the Cahaba River and the other streams and rivers in the immense basin. What emerged was the realization that such a remarkable river needed a group of people working almost exclusively in its defense. **Dr. Thomas Wilson**, an outdoor writer and biology professor at Judson College for 25 years, was just one of many who started focusing on the Cahaba while working with the Alabama Conservancy. "Back in the early days, we met and sat around in church basements in uncomfortable chairs talking about what we were going to do," Wilson explains. "The first thing we did was to create a slide presentation on the Cahaba for elementary schools," he continues. "That was our initial media effort."

From such humble beginnings, Wilson has continued work with the Cahaba. With a grant from the Birmingham Audubon Society, Wilson established a Cahaba River water monitoring station that his students in environmental science help operate. And light years from that initial slide show is the Cahaba River Society website provided by Judson College (<http://home.judson.edu/crs.html>). The CRS website was created by Wilson and co-worker Ruth Kastenmayer at Judson and was set up largely with his own money to further disseminate information concerning the river. Studying the Cahaba near where it passes Marion, Wilson sees the bottom of the drain, so to speak. But considering the river today, he also sees progress. "I believe the Cahaba River is in better shape now than at anytime in my twenty-five years of working with it. I can remember back when it ran solid black with soot from coal mining. Until recently, the Cahaba River had lost every battle," Wilson asserts, "but when the Cahaba River Society formed, from that moment the river has been recognized nationwide for its biological significance."

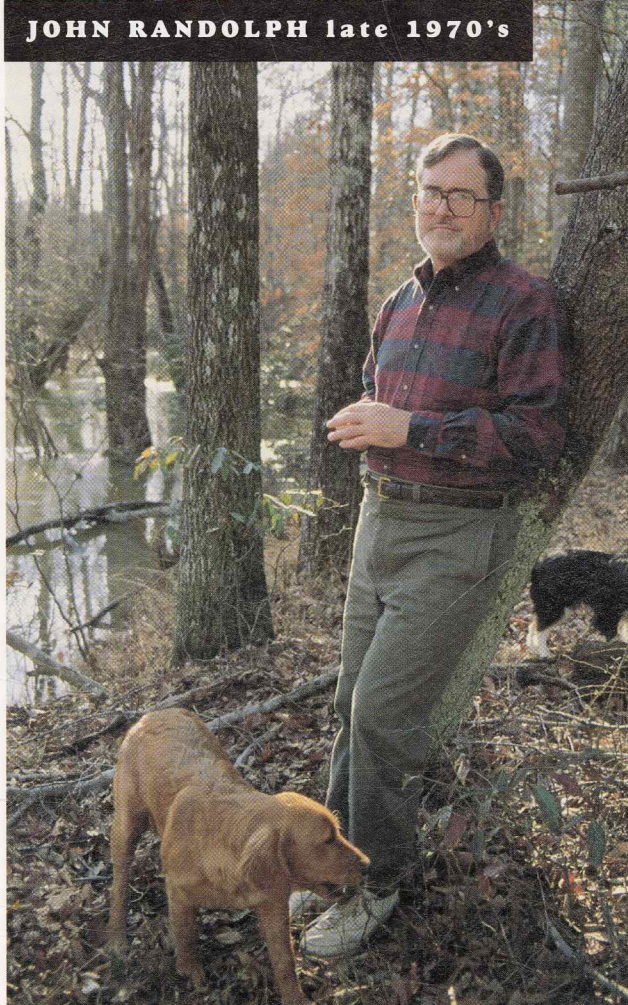
Around the mid-1980's, the ideas and strategies for protecting the Cahaba began converging

WEESIE SMITH early 1970's

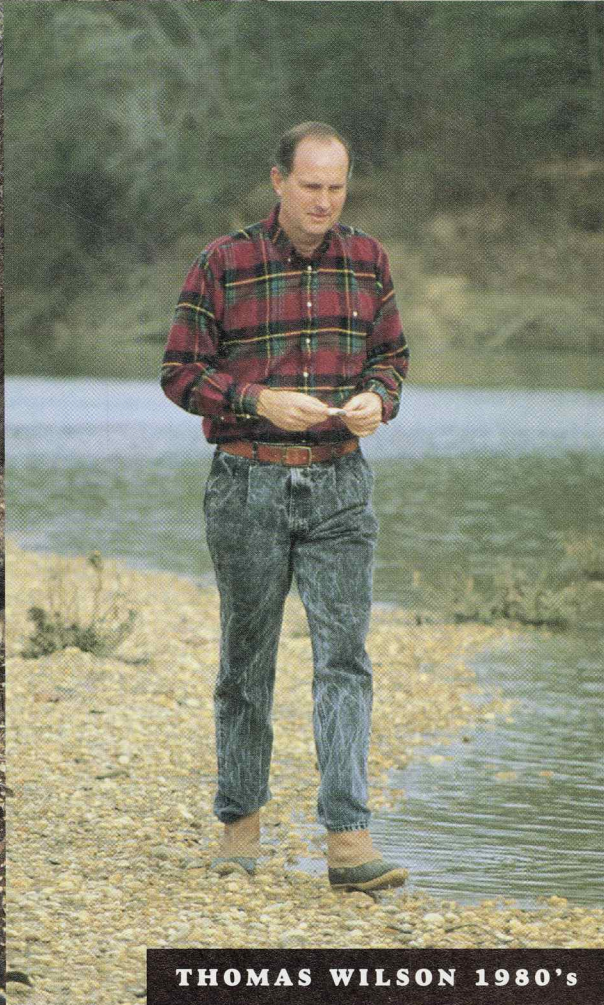


"You could see what was happening. At that time, there were plans to develop to the utmost areas adjacent to the Cahaba River. There were plans for a sewer line from Trussville to Riverchase. Illegal dumping of untreated sewage was happening at night. It was just on and on and on. No one seemed to care. We just did our best - it wasn't enough - but we tried."

JOHN RANDOLPH late 1970's



THOMAS WILSON 1980's



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and evolving. As the cause and direction of those interested in preserving the Cahaba became more clear, the need for an organization dedicated to the Cahaba River became apparent to the many involved. Such an organization would be the natural culmination of the efforts of the Alabama Conservancy and individuals such as Mary Burks, Weesie Smith, John Randolph, Thomas Wilson, and Don Elder. What they provided was a narrowing of focus, a specific direction to define the mission for years to come.

## The Cahaba River Society

The first Executive Director of the Cahaba River Society (CRS), **Don Elder**, became involved with the Cahaba River in a manner nearly identical to the way thousands of Alabamians for generations have: he went there to fish. From this modest beginning, he began to notice disturbing trends. "I could tell the river was clearly under pressure from changes in the basin. If things continued as they were, the river wouldn't be worth a fraction of what it could and should be to Alabamians."

Sensing a growing public interest and the potential for political support, in the spring of 1986 a small group of individuals began to meet to assess what could be done on the behalf of the river and the people that depend on it. Fundraising began, and by September 22, 1988, the CRS incorporated to devote itself to one specific river, one watershed. "It was our suspicion that a lot of energy was just waiting to be tapped. Soon, we just hung on for the ride." With more than 2,000 members, meetings in schools, with legislators, business interests, and developers, Elder witnessed what he calls an "explosion of interest" in the river.

By October of the same year, the CRS opened an office, and Elder became the director for the next six years. According to him, the chief reason for the organization's success was a clear mission statement. "Without a well-defined approach, we would have been adrift from the start," Elder contends. "We were in business to protect, preserve, and promote the river. We felt once we got the word out that the river is our drinking source, threatened by pollution and habitat degradation, as well as a source of tremendous biological diversity, it would be a story that people would latch on to." A good product sells itself.

One talent Elder brought to the CRS was his genius for examining the rules of a governmental organization and locating the inconsistencies in their public policy. Take the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) for example. By examining the various classifications for rivers provided by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Elder found that ADEM had disregarded the EPA's designation of Outstanding National Resource Water that provided for protection for waterways with high quality and notable biodiversity. Because of his action, ADEM had to acknowledge their error and classified the Little River under the national designation. A special category was also developed for the Cahaba, and the state placed the river in the Alabama Outstanding Water classification.

Elder took a similar policy-minded approach to the Alabama business community based on inclusion rather than exclusion. "One of our goals was to establish good relationships with businesses and individuals," Elder explains, making the point that economic development and river protection are not mutually exclusive but depend on each other. "Our standard message was that there is no villain. We took a businesslike approach to conservation. Organized for a purpose, we gathered information, planned, and tried to achieve our goals. Because of this, I can look back on my time at the CRS with no regrets."

By this time, the CRS had broadened its focus

and activities. After Don Elder made the decision to leave, the Board of Directors began looking for an executive director with a broad-based background in issues as varied as developmental, land use, and infrastructure to reflect the diverse interests CRS now had to deal with.

When **Beth Stewart** heard a presentation Don Elder gave about the CRS, she was working as the Executive Director of the Kentucky Waterways Alliance. The work the CRS did held an immediate interest for her, and she applied for the job. Her background in local governmental planning, housing, land use planning, tourism, and economic development made her an ideal candidate for the position. It surprised Stewart, a Birmingham native, to find that the river she played in as a child was so unique and endangered. Assuming the job of Executive Director of the CRS after Elder left marked something of a homecoming on many different levels.

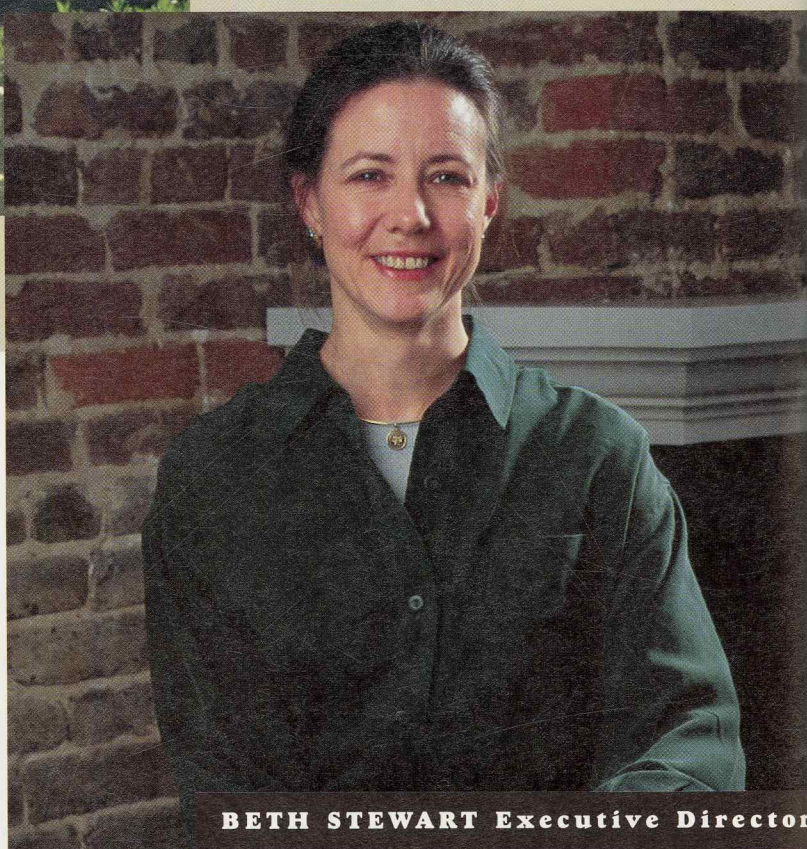
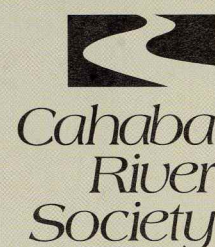
"Having been raised here in the 60's," Stewart begins, "a major issue in coming back was that I felt any effective organization would have to be one that represented the diversity of racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds in Alabama and the Birmingham area. This was a strong issue to me and one that the Board of Directors was already pursuing. Diversification and environmental justice are not just about protecting nature but also about protecting people. I came because I thought I could make a contribution."

CRS started working largely as a suburban group, but soon it began expanding into the urban areas of Birmingham to address problems residents face such as sewage bypassing in Valley, Village and Five Mile Creeks. In her first week on the job, Stewart helped secure a grant designed to help CRS bridge the gaps of race and income, an instance of how environmental preservation has grown in the decades since it first began to evolve.

Part of Stewart's experience involved bringing together opposing interests to find solutions to local planning issues. Such a practice has been the hallmark of CRS's corporate philosophy. "From the beginning, the CRS was envisioned differently than other preservation groups. The future of the environmental movement in terms of water resource management lies in a balancing act at the local level to find a local solution. All players must meet at the table to work out their differences. The CRS has been a pioneer in that regard."

Part of such a balancing act involved Stewart and others such as CRS Board member and attorney Bob Tate playing a mediating role in the recent sewer settlement. After private landowners along the Cahaba River sued Jefferson County for illegal sewage bypassing, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Justice got involved. CRS intervened in the case and worked with all parties until a reasonable settlement could be reached that would benefit all involved. According to county officials, the role CRS played has helped make the repair schedule easier to finance and manage. Discussing the sewer settlement, Stewart points out that "the take-home message is that, yes, our community can afford clean water."

Looking at the future of the CRS, Stewart envisions what she calls "incredible possibilities" and begins listing some projects on which she intends to involve the CRS: the Greenways proposal, a commitment for Jefferson County to invest \$30 million to protect and restore streamside land in the county; the Cahaba Basin management plan, a regional approach to reducing stormwater pollution;



**BETH STEWART** Executive Director

"Having been raised here in the 60's," Stewart begins, "a major issue in coming back was that I felt any effective organization would have to be one that represented the diversity of racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds in Alabama and the Birmingham area. This was a strong issue to me and one that the Board of Directors was already pursuing. Diversification and environmental justice are not just about protecting nature but also about protecting people. I came because I thought I could make a contribution."

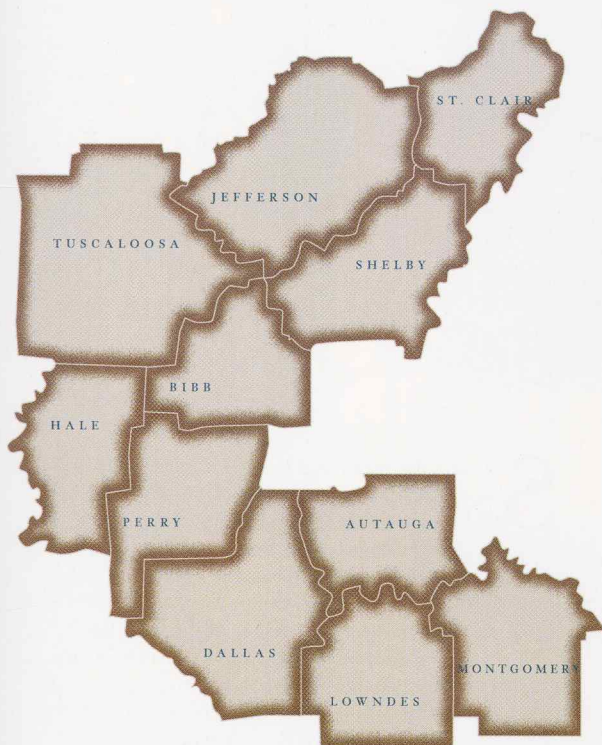
and a basinwide plan to balance drinking water withdrawals, sewage discharge, and restoration of the river's biological health, to name a few.

"Birmingham has gone through a social and economic transformation and is becoming a great place to live," Stewart suggests, "but the rest of the country doesn't know about it yet. We have perhaps the greatest environmental potential of any city, but we have not protected or made it accessible to everyone. The new Greenways plan can redefine our urban environment. We also have one of the best networks of abandoned railroads in the Southeast that can be converted into trails. We can reclaim environmentally degraded urban areas, save these natural spaces, and transform our image. Cities that develop extensive greenways and trail networks are seen as being cutting edge, the ones full of potential. Birmingham has the ability to be one of these cities. The question is," Stewart continues, "are we going to just stick to the old ways of thinking, or are we going to make something happen?"

For Beth Stewart and the Cahaba River Society, one means to focus the public's attention on the Cahaba is by vividly illustrating how a clean, healthy drinking water source and a biologically viable river system are in every individual's or business' greater interest. When some three decades ago Weesie Smith raised controversial questions about the city's policy of wastewater management, a "ruckus" ensued. Today, groups like the Cahaba River Society can work with the county in everyone's interest. Currently, more than 80 businesses are supporting and working with the CRS as members to find long-term solutions to today's problems. But one facet of early Cahaba River preservation remains as much a truism today as it was in the past: environmental wounds heal by slow degrees, and the healing process depends on diligence.

Still, one has to think that if more people had listened to individuals like Mary Burks, John Randolph, and Weesie Smith 20 and 30 years ago when they first rallied around the Cahaba River, many growing pains we feel today could have been, if not avoided, then certainly significantly less intense. But the evolution of a philosophy that views the protection of the environment as synonymous with the protection of our own quality of life can be a long time coming. The Cahaba River Society has worked to shorten the time we must wait.





State-designated 11 county Cahaba Valley region map.

## The Cahaba Trace Commission

*Preserving Alabama's historical treasures while continuing to foster economic progress is not necessarily contradictory. In fact, the Cahaba Trace Commission feels the two trends compliment one another.*

Day by day, year by year, anyone who travels the back roads of central Alabama knows that pieces of a rich historical legacy are literally rotting away. Old, decaying antebellum mansions, leaning heartwood pine barns, deserted rural churches, and quiet town squares may inspire romance, but to see them in disrepair certainly does not foster pride in either Alabama's past or the direction of its present. In terms of historical preservation, Alabama has long lagged behind its southern neighbors in appreciating and acting to save the relics of yesteryear. That sad fact may be a thing of the past.

Formed in 1985 and partly funded by the state, the Cahaba Trace Commission was created with a clear and urgent mission: promote the rich historical, cultural, and natural assets of the Cahaba River Valley and neighboring areas. Accordingly, 11 counties were chosen for the trace. Along the upper reaches of the Cahaba River, St. Clair, Jefferson, Shelby, Tuscaloosa, and Bibb Counties are included, falling as they do within the river's 1,870 square mile watershed. Along the lower reaches of the river, Perry and Dallas County reflect the Cahaba Trace Commission's strong emphasis on the state's agricultural heartland, which also includes Hale, Autauga, Lowndes, and Montgomery County. Containing large metropolitan areas such as Birmingham, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa as well as areas and small towns that can boast a larger population in 1840 than today, one of the chief challenges facing the Cahaba Trace Commission has been the organization's large and varied heritage. From industrial boom town to antebellum plantation to quiet, scenic waterways, the Cahaba Trace runs through Alabama's past and present, linked by a river known nationally for its tremendous biological significance. The Cahaba River runs through the geographical heart of Alabama.

With a goal to connect the Old South with the New, the official Cahaba Trace route runs from Trussville's Cahaba River Park, through Birmingham to Bessemer, past Tannehill and West Blocton, and on to Brierfield and then Centreville. From there the Trace passes through Marion and ends at Old Cahawba, the state's first permanent capital. Starting near the industrial district of the "Magic City" and ceasing at the abandoned ruins of Old Cahawba, the route takes visitors on a journey that encompasses both what Alabama was and what the state has become. It marks and explains our origins in the town of Cahawba at the river's mouth and reveals hints of our future destinations in the thriving city of Birmingham. For those interested in Alabama history, the Cahaba Trace route leads them through a section of Alabama rich in beauty and heritage.

"I was thinking about the Natchez Trace and the tourists it attracts when there was so much talk about the Cahaba River's value to the state," begins Earl Goodwin, former State Senator from Selma. Called by some the "Father of the Cahaba Trace," during his tenure Goodwin



**The Cahaba Trace Commission's ELISE BLACKWELL (left) and RITA FRANKLIN (right) at Selma's Sturdivant Hall**

*"When you look at the river, it runs from near Birmingham to Old Cahawba, the state's first capital. We felt like the historical aspect would be a great way to start promoting the area and the river, since the Trace contains so many of the old homes of the old South and so many historic structures."*

*Earl Goodwin, "Father of the Cahaba Trace"*

was instrumental in passing the legislation which established the commission and secured funding. "When you look at the river, it runs from near Birmingham to Old Cahawba, the state's first capital. We felt like the historical aspect would be a great way to start promoting the area and the river, since the Trace contains so many of the old homes of the old South and so many historic structures." Some of the commission's early work has focused on documenting for the first time just what each county contains. Exhaustive county-wide surveys of every structure 50 years old or older are now complete in most of the 11 counties. The information gleaned from this study has been an important first step in the documentation of what each county holds and what must be protected. But beautiful old homes and courthouse squares will not be preserved by photos and descriptions recorded in files. One overriding purpose of the Cahaba Trace Commission is to act as a catalyst, making others aware of just what treasures are in each of these counties if one is willing to leave the somnolent peace of the interstate system and travel back into a more intimate relationship with the contours of Alabama's landscape.

To get most people to leave their numbingly familiar highways, you need a greater attraction than one town, no matter how beautiful and historic it may be. The Cahaba Trace Commission, by selecting one site in each of the 11 counties, creates a larger picture of the region as a whole than each individual site could manage alone. Each site becomes connected both geographically and thematically to the greater whole of the Cahaba Trace. Thus the similarities embedded in the courthouse squares of Ashville, Marion, and Hayneville—three of only four antebellum structures built as courthouses still remaining in use in the state—becomes readily apparent. But after a walk or slow drive through each town, clear differences take shape as one learns more about the events and people who shaped the town's development. A more diverse, full portrait of each town's distinctive personality emerges. And while Selma, Marion, and Lowndesboro are well-known for their impressive 19th century homes, each town has a distinct flavor and style. The historic parks—Moundville, Tannehill, and Brierfield—together tell a story of the region's past that stretches thousands of years from prehistory to modern times—linked by its wild game and foods; abundant river systems for transportation, drinking water, and agricultural uses; as well as the mineral resources the land provided.

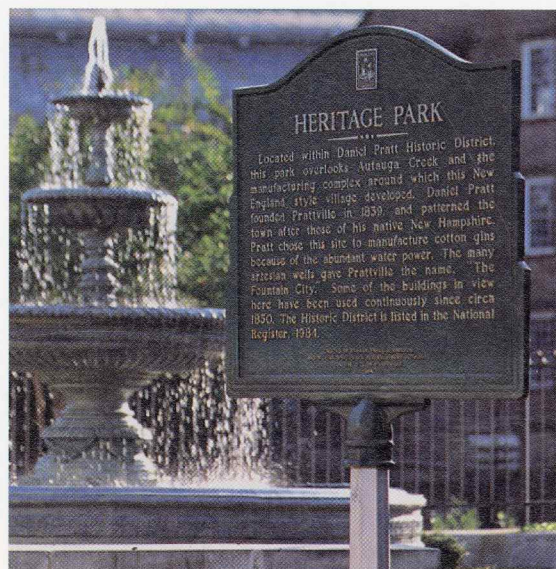
By providing an umbrella for promotion, development, and preservation, the Cahaba Trace in effect is simply setting the stage for each community along the route to present itself to visitors. While so many in Alabama and neighboring states will have heard of the towns and sites along the Trace, now that this region is presented in a unified manner to the tourist, the collective strength of each site will help overcome any individual weakness. Economic development comes at the local level based on the abilities, resources, and energy of each site on the Trace. And consequently, revenues from tourism originate and stay in the area that generated them, providing a clear incentive for all involved. But what may be the most exciting result of all is that the historic structures—be they houses, the remains of old blast furnaces, turn-of-the-century store fronts, wooden churches, or places of archaeological significance—will now hopefully be seen as resources for the communities rather than simply another old building. Once it becomes clear that people are coming to these relatively isolated communities solely to see, photograph, and learn about the history recorded in the physical environment of a place, the incentive for preservation and economic renewal will follow.

Recently, the national movement towards heritage tourism and ecotourism has become one of the largest growth industries in the country. Alabama has resources—environmental and historical—that are difficult for any nearby state to match. Environmentally, Alabama is one of the most diverse states in the United States rivaled by

few if any areas of comparable size. One 190-mile river, the Cahaba, has more fish species than the entire state of California. A host of physiographic provinces intersect in Alabama, setting the stage for a tremendous variety of flora and fauna. Bibb County, roughly the center of the Cahaba Trace, is home to the most spectacular collection of rare plant species in the Southeast. Since 1992, eight new species have been discovered in the glades along the Little Cahaba River. In terms of history, the area we now call Alabama has been under Spanish, French, British, Confederate, and American flags. Hernando de Soto passed through the Trace area in the 16th century, bringing the old world into a violent confrontation with the new. The practice of slavery, abolished almost everywhere else in the world, painfully and regrettably continued in the South and Alabama until scarcely more than 130 years ago. The Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow laws are still a present memory. And many still alive participated in the tumultuous Civil Rights Era as it raged violently and passionately across Alabama. Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery, often called the Civil Rights Triangle, are all in the region. Indeed, some of the hardest lessons learned in America have their genesis in Alabama's Cahaba Trace.

For the many tourists interested in the natural environment and heritage of Alabama, the Cahaba Trace brings together famous industrial centers like Sloss Furnace as well as earlier, more primitive blast furnaces in Tannehill and Brierfield. It offers some of the most important Civil Rights sites in America as well as documents a number of small but crucial events that took place in towns like Marion and Hayneville. For those researching their roots, archives and museums in Ashville, Selma, Prattville and Columbiana hold family documents, court records, and newspapers dating back before statehood. In Montgomery, Old Alabama Town, a collection of 41 restored historic buildings, allow the visitor a glimpse of what life in 19th and early 20th century Alabama looked like. And connecting the Cahaba Trace is the longest free-flowing river remaining in Alabama, a resource that provides fishing, swimming, and other recreation in quiet seclusion though parts of the Cahaba River are only minutes from the state's largest city.

It is no coincidence that the commission is named after the river with more fish species than any other river of its size in North America. Jerry Pow, Chair of the Cahaba Trace Commission explains "I think one of our main purposes is to promote the Cahaba River and the basin, bring it to the public's attention for the great resource that it is." In the last decade, the river has become almost legendary for the wealth of life it contains. As an environmental symbol of national significance, the Cahaba River holds all that is best in the state, making it the obvious choice when naming a heritage organization dedicated to promoting the same in Alabama and beyond.



The Cahaba Trace Commission's historic marker in Prattville.





# Epilogue

## *The Cahaba River Society and the Cahaba Trace Commission: Defining the Cahaba River Valley for the Future*

They came from South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Tennessee, even France. All over the United States, word spread of the Alabama country, and Alabama Fever in the early part of the 19th century brought so many settlers that neighboring states began to grow concerned at their vanishing populations—all gone to Alabama. The reasons they came have changed somewhat today: squatting for land is a thing of the past and a long growing season matters to few relocating in the state. The plentiful wild game and tremendous natural resources Alabama contains may be a selling point for some, but one constant for the first European settlers and those still coming to Alabama continues to be an abundant, cheap, and clean supply of water. Few consider it now, but historically, one of Alabama's chief assets has been this common substance necessary for all life.

The waterways were rivers of life, natural borders, and vast arteries allowing traffic to spread across the land for Native Americans. To Choctaws and Chickasaws, the Cahaba River served as a clear demarcation between their territories. Huge distances could be covered and trade goods exchanged without ever leaving a dugout canoe. Consequently, most towns and villages were located near rivers or streams. When the Spaniards, the French, and then the British arrived in the area, to a large degree, this pattern remained. Settlements began along the Gulf Coast and spread up the Alabama River and beyond. When Andrew Jackson entered present-day Alabama, his maps revealed that nearly all the Native American towns he would encounter existed along major rivers. That Alabama's four capitals from territory to statehood are on four different rivers—St. Stephens, the Tombigbee River; Cahawba, the Cahaba and Alabama Rivers; Tuscaloosa, the Black Warrior River; and Montgomery, the Alabama River—shows some indication of the prominence of rivers in Alabama history.

For early Alabamians, the name "Cahawba" held several connotations: the state's first capital, flood and decay, renewal and boom town during King Cotton days, and again, abandonment and ruin. The bad reputation the town Cahawba earned—unjustifiably, as it turns out—during its capital days as a flood-prone site set between two rivers would spell the end of the town. Those that wanted the capital removed found the ammunition they needed in a mild flood in 1822. It may be that the exaggerated tales of state legislators rowing out of the courthouse's second floor was the biggest favor done for the Cahaba River. To this day, the river continues to flow through a surprisingly remote landscape largely untouched by man. But though it is one of the few significant rivers in the state to remain undregged and undammed, it is not untapped.

By the late 19th century, the population of Birmingham had grown dramatically. Village Creek, a tributary of the Black Warrior River and the young city's original municipal water source, rapidly became fouled with waste. The city needed clean water. As a result, the Birmingham Water Works built a diversion dam in 1891 on the Cahaba below where the Little Cahaba joins the Cahaba. It was to mark the beginning of a long and complex history inextricably binding Birmingham and the river's fate together. The Lake Purdy dam was built in 1911, and in 1929, the same dam was raised 20 feet to increase the lake's holding capacity in times of low water. Surrounding communities now had an inexpensive, healthy source of drinking water. Remarkably, all that was needed to make the water perfectly drinkable was a short period of settling. Residents soon relied almost entirely on the Cahaba for their water needs.

In the context of Alabama, it is safe to call the Cahaba River unique. This may not have always been so, but it has never been more true than it is today: few rivers in the country can compare mile for mile in terms of rich-

ness of life. The longest free-flowing river left in the state, the Cahaba is one of the nation's most biologically diverse and endangered rivers. It is home to 131 species of fish, more than in any North American river of comparable size. The Cahaba lily and many other rare species of plants and animals depend on the river habitat for survival. In 1941, a young boy named L. W. Price was fishing just above Centreville on the Cahaba when he spotted an 8-foot-long, 360-pound Atlantic sturgeon. On its way from the Gulf via the Alabama River, the fish had come to spawn in the Cahaba and was stranded on some rocks during low water. Its like will never be seen again in the Cahaba: today, a series of dams on the Alabama make it impossible for any sturgeon or other fish species to make it to the Cahaba by the same route. The Cahaba shiner, a small fish found nowhere else in the world, now exists in an ever-shrinking 15-mile range due to habitat degradation. But recently along the banks of the Little Cahaba River, eight previously unknown plant species were discovered. For all the losses the river has endured, there are grand discoveries yet to be made. As a natural resource, the entire Cahaba River Basin is a sparkling jewel of which Alabamians can be justifiably proud.

But the demands we place on the river are high. Today, we draw 57 million gallons of water daily from the Cahaba River for residential and industrial uses. Some 27 million gallons of treated sewage are permitted to be released back into the river daily from 40 sewage treatment plants. Heavy rains can force illegal overflow discharges of untreated sewage directly into the river. In the first three months of 1995, 50 million gallons of raw or improperly treated sewage and 222 million gallons of minimally treated sewage were released into the Cahaba River during the wet season.

Still, substantial progress has been made regarding the illegal dumping of raw sewage. First, Jefferson County will upgrade its aging sewer system to prevent such overflow dumping. In October of 1996, Jefferson County, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Cahaba River Society, and private landowners on the river settled a 1993 lawsuit filed by landowners concerning the practice of releasing raw and partially treated sewage into the Cahaba and Black Warrior tributaries of urban Birmingham. The county also volunteered to protect and restore streambank forests and open spaces along both rivers to reduce storm-water pollution. As a river is burdened by an increasing population, its capability to accept more waste diminishes. We must look to creative alternatives instead of viewing the river as a giant sewer drain at our immediate disposal. Land application and irrigation with treated wastewater is just one option that can curb the need to draw more water from the Cahaba while still meeting the needs of the community. We can have a healthy economy and a healthy river.

No one expects a river near a city of Birmingham's size to be pristine. At least 103 industrial discharge permits have been granted in the Cahaba basin, releasing a variety of toxic heavy metals, chemicals, and other substances. Heavy construction along banks dumps tons of sediment that kills fish eggs, clogs gills, halts mussel reproduction, damages insect habitat, and generally smothers the vegetation and insects that are the base of the food chain. When rainwater hits parking lots and streets, runoff picks up motor oil, gasoline, and other contaminants and takes them directly to the river. Herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers flow off golf courses, parks, and lawns and drain from farms and office complexes. Trash thrown on the ground does not remain there long; rain washes it down storm sewers directly to the river. Think of this progression as a vast interstate system directing trash, refuse, and chemicals to the Cahaba. It is what a population of almost one million people can do to a river. Still, compared to other rivers in Alabama, the Cahaba remains surprisingly clean considering its proximity to the state's largest city.

Set amid the Valley and Ridge region of Alabama, the Cahaba River Valley has long been at the core of the region's history. At the foot of the river lies the ruins of Old Cahawba, the first permanent capital. Up the Alabama River lies Selma and further upstream, today's capital, Montgomery. Before the Civil War, these counties and towns held tremendous wealth from the cotton trade and slavery. While the lower reaches of the Cahaba touch some of the richest agricultural land in the South, the northern expanses of the river flow through the vast mineral deposits that fed the industrial development that so shaped Alabama's more recent past. From early blast furnaces to coal mines to steel, the Cahaba remains the clean water source that allowed such industrial and residential growth to flourish.

But while the Cahaba River is increasingly recognized for the tremendous resource it has always been, the heritage of the region this river passes through has yet to be recognized for its tremendous potential. The story has not been adequately told, and people do not know what treasures lie hidden in and along the Cahaba River Valley. To remedy this, the Cahaba Trace Commission was founded with the goal to help preserve part of Alabama's rich history. For those interested in Alabama's past, Southern heritage, environmental wonders, and civil rights history, the Cahaba Trace is waiting to tell the story. Along with the Cahaba River Society, the Commission believes that preservation—be it historical or environmental—cannot easily proceed without clear motivation.

For the Cahaba River and the Cahaba Trace, the case for economic motivation is easily established. A clean drinking source is imperative for any kind of development. The way to ensure this is to protect the health of the river on which the state depends so heavily. This is achieved by actively promoting the welfare of the Cahaba River. The Cahaba Trace Commission seeks to attract visitors knowing that people will come to the sites when they realize the great biological significance and beauty of the Cahaba River and the valley it meanders through. It is sound economics to keep the river clean; people do not take the time or spend the money to investigate the treasures of a region if the river that connects it is allowed to deteriorate. Recreational and environmental tourism does not flourish amid a fouled waterway. In the most simple terms, a scenic, healthy Cahaba River benefits more than just those who depend on it as a water source.

Connecting the story of plantations and newly-freed slaves, poor coal miners and industrialists, sharecroppers and farmers, and African-Americans in their struggle for equal rights, the Cahaba Trace ultimately is like a vessel containing in microcosm the successes and travails this young country passed through on its way toward maturity. We now have the opportunity to take and shape this vessel so that in the future, the river becomes a symbol of the many links these communities share. We can create a legacy that fashions together progressive economies, a treasured heritage, and a clean, beautiful environment. As people begin to recognize the true value of the river and our history, they learn the importance of the many strengths Alabama possesses, be they natural, historical, or societal. Without thoughtful stewardship of these treasures, this remarkable heritage will vanish.

That the Cahaba Trace Commission chose the Cahaba lily as their emblem is even more appropriate since the lily remains the most recognizable symbol of the Cahaba's precious natural diversity and the need to preserve all that make it so distinctive. Just as the Cahaba River Society actively seeks to protect and preserve the river, the Cahaba Trace Commission is dedicated to documenting, celebrating, and promoting the many sites the Commission encompasses. With these two organizations, a unique assortment of the state's environmentalists, historians, politicians, civil servants, scholars, and civic-minded residents has begun working together to save much of what is best in Alabama—and its citizens.







*Special thanks to Beth Maynor Young for her generous donation of time  
and the usage of her photographic images of the Cahaba.*



# For Additional Reference

## Cover



• **Background Map.** United States Department of Interior Geological Survey, Alabama – Montevallo Quadrangle. Edition: July, 1910 (Reprinted 1944, Surveyed 1907-1908).



• **Quartz.** Arrowhead, approximately 10,000 years old. Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor.



• **Greenbreast Darter.** Photo courtesy of Dr. Mike Howell. Endemic to the Alabama River drainage of the eastern Mobile basin, the Greenbreast Darter grows to a length of 1.6 to 2.4 inches and is found most often above the Fall Line in cobble, gravel, and slab shoals with moderate to swift current.

**Note:** For information on other cover photos, refer to the essays in which they appear.

## Inside Cover

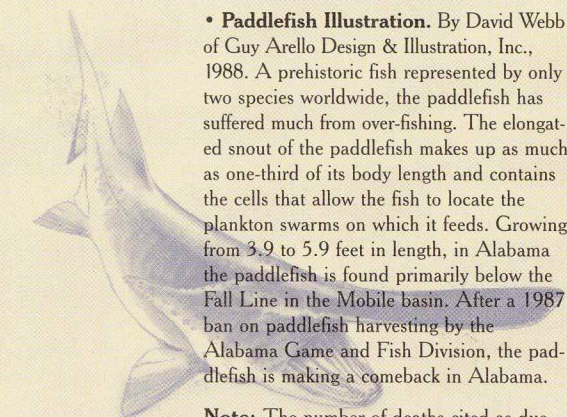


• **Flowing Water Illustration.** Copyright 1997 Phototone by Guy Arello. Black and white photo on linen paper colored with pencil and watercolor.

## Alabama: A Wealth of Water



• **Graphic Illustrations.** Designed by Joe Rogers Studio, Nashville, Tennessee.



• **Paddlefish Illustration.** By David Webb of Guy Arello Design & Illustration, Inc., 1988. A prehistoric fish represented by only two species worldwide, the paddlefish has suffered much from over-fishing. The elongated snout of the paddlefish makes up as much as one-third of its body length and contains the cells that allow the fish to locate the plankton swarms on which it feeds. Growing from 3.9 to 5.9 feet in length, in Alabama the paddlefish is found primarily below the Fall Line in the Mobile basin. After a 1987 ban on paddlefish harvesting by the Alabama Game and Fish Division, the paddlefish is making a comeback in Alabama.

**Note:** The number of deaths cited as due to a lack of water or unsanitary water is taken from United Nations' estimates.

## Another Way of Life: Native Americans and the Cahaba River Valley



• **Hernando De Soto.** From the Library of Congress Copy of Retratos de los Espanoles ilustres con un epitome de sus vidas (Madrid, 1791).



• **Geronimo de Chavez's Map of La Florida.** Courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives. The first printed map that included information about the De Soto expedition, Chavez's map appeared in an atlas by Ortelius. "La Florida" is what the Spanish called the entire Southeast.



• **De Soto's Enslavement of the Indians.** Spanish engraver unknown. The conquistador's entrada, as the Spanish called his journey, was of such size that captured Indians were often used to carry De Soto's provisions. Spanish narratives from the journey also record De Soto's use of female Indians. According to Rangel, one of De Soto's men, the Spanish required women for "servants and for their foul uses and lewdness, and that they had them baptized more on account of carnal intercourse with them than to teach them the faith."



• **The Battle of Mabila.** Hand-colored etching, artist unknown. The strongly fortified city of Mabila (also known as Mauvilla) is Alabama's El Dorado of Native American archaeological sites. Mabila held some 80 houses and a main square surrounded by a palisade. Early historian Albert J. Pickett in his 1841 history of Alabama placed the site at Choctaw Bluff in Clarke County while other historians such as Clarence B. Moore suggested the Indian mounds of Greene County. At the 450th anniversary of De Soto's journey through Alabama, a group of researchers suggested Mabila was in Dallas County where the Cahaba flows into the Alabama River. If Mabila could be found, historians would have a much needed point of reference to trace De Soto's route through Alabama.



• **Maize.** Hand-colored etching, artist unknown.



• **1732 French Map by Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville.** Courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives. This is the first map known to identify the Cahaba River. Looking at the second column, first full paragraph of the essay's second page, one can see the Cahaba spelled "Cabo" by d'Anville.



• **Native American Artifacts beside Cahaba River.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor.

## Spring Becomes River



• **Vignette Photo of Cahaba Headwaters.** Copyright 1996 Beth Maynor Young.



• **Calamite Fossil.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. From the Carboniferous Period of the Paleozoic Era, 290 to 240 million years ago, when coal-bearing swamps covered the Cahaba region.



• **Black-Nobbed Sawback.** Only found in the Mobile River drainage below the Fall Line. Wary and hard to approach, this turtle eats insects and sleeps on logs and brush piles. The male grows to 3-4 inches, the female to 4-7 1/2 inches.



• **Shark Tooth Fossil.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. Sharks are from the chondrichthyes family meaning sharks have a cartilaginous-skeleton which is why only their teeth remain as fossils. Cartilage is usually too soft to make a fossil. Early in the Paleozoic Era some shark species may have inhabited freshwater.



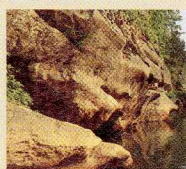
• **River Redhorse.** Copyright 1989 Beth Maynor. Occurring in medium to large-sized streams of moderate to swift currents, the Redhorse feeds on freshwater mussels and insect larvae. The Cahaba River is the species' stronghold.



• **Withdrawing Nectar.** Copyright 1992 Beth Maynor. Cahaba River Society's Field Director Randall C. Haddock measures nectar volume.



• **Alabama's Unique Geology.** Geology map provided by the Geological Survey of Alabama.



• **Limestone Outcropping.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. Limestone in Bibb County near the River Bend Bridge. These outcroppings are home to the Alabama Croton and are some of the most interestingly-shaped geological formations along the river.



• **Alabama Croton.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. At this point in time, the only place the Croton has been documented is on one bluff on the Cahaba in Bibb County and a similar limestone bluff on the Black Warrior River.



• **Cahaba Lily Habitat.** Copyright 1994 Beth Maynor. Found where overlapping rock slabs run in vertical ridges, the Cahaba Lily's bulbs can wedge into crevices to hold fast against the current.



• **Cahaba Lily.** Copyright 1989 Beth Maynor. The Cahaba Lily blooms from mid-May to mid-June when water levels have dropped sufficiently. The town of West Blocton hosts a Cahaba Lily Festival each year and provides canoe tours of the blooming lilies toward the end of May.



• **Coastal Plain Section.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. The longest sandbar on the Cahaba (over one mile long) is in an area just south of where this photo was taken near Marion at Barton's Beach.



• **Alligator.** Copyright 1996 Beth Maynor Young. Below the Fall Line, alligators are becoming more numerous, and adults have been seen just south of Centreville.



• **Sunset on the River.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. A popular place to camp and swim, the sandbars here are edged with willow trees and are constantly changing in size and shape.



• **Ferns on Selma Chalk.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor. A distinctive geological feature, the Selma Chalk Beds provide a home for ferns and other river plant species. Composed of fine silt, they are an especially rich source for marine fossils.



• **Oxbow Swamp.** Copyright 1990. Beth Maynor.

## The Paradox of the Insignificant: Messages Found in Mussels

Mussel description runs counterclockwise starting at the top left corner of the essay.

All photos courtesy of John Harris.



• **Washboard.** (7") Occasionally found in the lower reaches of the main stem of the Cahaba, this species is stable elsewhere though increasingly rare in the Cahaba.



• **Little Spectaclecase.** (2.5") Common in smaller tributaries.



• **Butterfly.** (5") Appears to be declining in the Cahaba and in other parts of its range.

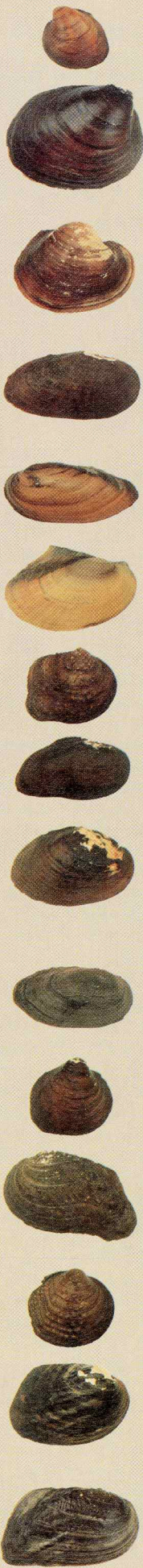


• **Bleufer.** (6") The purple "mother-of-pearl" from this species is used for jewelry and wood inlay.



• **Three-horned Wartyback.** (2.5") Common in the southern half of the river.





- **Gulf Pigtoe.** (2") Stable in the Cahaba.
- **Ebonyshell.** (4.5") This species is probably stable in the Cahaba but is of special concern elsewhere.
- **Southern Pocketbook.** (5") Abundant in the southern half of the Cahaba.
- **Black Sandshell.** (8") Recently found in the Cahaba and declining throughout its range.
- **Yellow Sandshell.** (6") Relatively common in southern half of the Cahaba.
- **Fragile Papershell.** (6") The papershell prefers slow-moving pools of water.
- **Southern Mapleleaf.** (4") Probably stable in the Cahaba.
- **Elephant Ear.** (6") This species is fairly tolerant of pollution and remains stable.
- **Southern Fatmucket.** (4") Found in smaller tributaries, the Fatmucket is probably stable in the Cahaba.
- **Delicate Spike.** (2.5") Occasionally found in the northern half of the Cahaba.
- **Pimpleback.** (2.5") Abundant in the southern half of the Cahaba.
- **Pistolgrip.** (8") Fairly tolerant of pollution and remains stable throughout its range.
- **Alabama Orb.** (2.5") Abundant in the lower half of the Cahaba.
- **Three-ridge.** (5") Formerly common in the headwaters, it is now difficult to find live specimens.
- **Bank Climber.** (5.5") Recently discovered in the Cahaba, it is relatively common elsewhere.

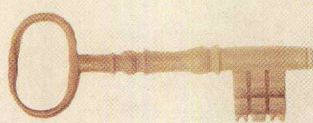
## A Capital in Wilderness

All photos courtesy of the State of Alabama Department of Archives and History.



period. Since the Kirkpatrick family owned a brickyard, they constructed a smaller replica of their house to be used as slave quarters and a laundry. Though the mansion is no longer standing, the Alabama Historical Commission has just acquired the slave quarters/laundry building. It is an odd site: a lonely, two story building with small columns next to a field of untended pecan trees.

- **Kirkpatrick House.** (circa 1860) One of the grand homes of Cahawba, the home was remarkable if only because it was made of bricks, unusual for the time

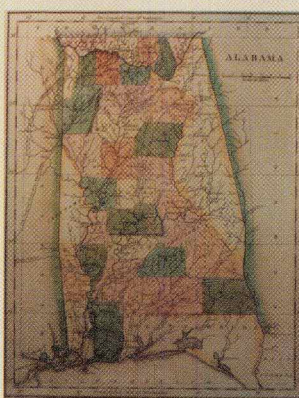


- **Key to Alabama's First Permanent Statehouse.** Though there exists no known picture or painting of the building, the artist Hugh Martin has done a rendering of the statehouse

advertised in the *Halcyon and Tombeckbe Advertiser* on March 1, 1819. See William H. Brantley, Jr.'s *Three Capitals: A Book About the First Three Capitals of Alabama: St. Stephens, Huntsville, & Cahawba, 1818-1826* for drawing.



- **First Capital Dome.** The only known remains of Alabama's first capital building now sits on the 163-year old St. James Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Lowndesboro. Built in 1833 as a white Methodist Church, the building was later sold to a black congregation. It closed in 1983. Copper plated, the dome required six teams of oxen and approximately one month to move the heavy structure 45 miles from Cahawba to Lowndesboro. As the condition of both the dome and church deteriorate, the Alabama Historical Commission has added the building to its list of "Places in Peril."



- **Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Map of Alabama, 1822** by R. Lucas. Courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives. What this map does not show is that on the 1818 map of Alabama, there existed a Cahawba County encompassing much of today's Perry, Bibb, Chilton, and Shelby Counties as well as the southern portion of Jefferson County. In his 1947

study, *Three Capitals*, William H. Brantley, Jr. describes Governor Bibb's arduous ride from Cahawba to his home near Huntsville and illustrates what this early map does not: "The best route was to go northwest from Cahawba toward the town of Erie in Greene County and at a road junction where today stands the town of Greensboro turn north up the valley of the Black Warrior to Tuscaloosa, Jonesboro, Elyton (today's Birmingham), Blountsville, Ditto's Landing (today's Whitesburg), and so to Huntsville and then to his home in Limestone County. This ride on horseback was of itself sufficient reason why the Tennessee Valley people wanted the capital moved from Cahawba."

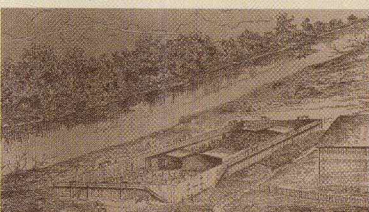


- **Early Map of Cahawba.** Probably drawn around the time of the first sale of lots in May 1819, one of the more interesting features of the map is Arch Street which follows the palisade line of an old Indian town. The street begins at the river's edge and slowly curves up the hill so that wagons could easily make their way to the Alabama River to load and unload supplies. Continuing along Arch Street, the road curves again on its way back down to the river, again making the route easier for wagon loads.



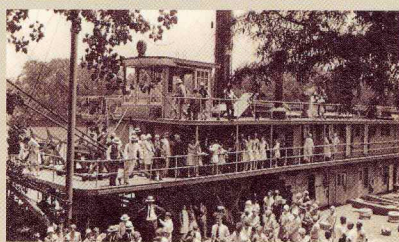
- **Perine House.** (circa 1852) Originally built as a factory, the building was converted to a massive home by E. M. Perine, a merchant from New York related to the Crocherons.

It was the first air conditioned building in Alabama as Perine had the plentiful artesian water pumped through pipes in the house, effectively cooling it in the summer months. Perine also owned a packet line that sailed from Mobile to Cuba to New York.



- **Sketch of Cahaba Prison.** Private Jesse Hawes of the Ninth Illinois Calvary published a memoir in 1888 of his time spent in Cahaba Federal Prison entitled

*Cahaba: A Story of Captive Boys in Blue.* It is perhaps the best record of day-to-day prison events in Cahawba. Hawes' sketch shows the guard's walkway along the stockade wall and the drainage ditch that was the prisoner's water supply. The river to the left of the prison is the Alabama.



- **Day Trip to Cahawba.** In the 1920's, Anna M. Gayle Fry, author of *Memories of Old Cahaba*, organized the Cahaba Memorial

Association to commemorate the old capital site. This trip on board the *Montgomery* probably originated in Selma and was one of the association's outings spent visiting the ruins. Many of the photos we have of the site come from such outings before the few remaining buildings were torn down or collapsed.



- **Crocheron House.** (circa 1843) Just above where the Cahaba River joins the Alabama stood one of Old Cahawba's grand homes. R.C. Crocheron, from Staten Island, New York, built the statehouse and ran a profitable mercantile business in Cahawba.

Interestingly enough, the mansion was built onto the rear of his family's mercantile, and nearby were several millinery establishments, shoe stores, tailors, and a tin shop. Each summer, the Crocherons would return north to Saratoga to "take the water," and after the death of Crocheron's wife, Ann, they moved back to New York permanently.



- **Vine Street.**

The two story brick building behind the row of mulberry trees was E.M. Perine's dry goods store in the 1850's. Across 2nd North Street stood Bell Tavern, a two story frame building painted white with green

blinds that was a gathering place where lawyers, politicians, and wealthy planters played billiards or poker while waiting on a boat to Mobile. Lafayette's grand banquet probably took place here in 1825. Across Vine Street stood a collection of businesses: a grocery store, jewelry store, dry goods stores, a harness and saddle shop, a saloon, post office, bakery, and barber shop.



- **Crocheron Columns.** The remains of the Crocheron house's five side columns are all that remain intact today of this once magnificent home.

**Note:** During the 1840's and 1850's, the spelling of Cahawba changed to the modern spelling "Cahaba" for both the town and the river. As a large influx of emigrants and settlers entered the area during those boom days changing the makeup of the town's "native" planter class, the spelling seems to have gradually evolved. Today, the site of the former town is often referred to as "Old Cahawba," though in town records, "Cahaba" emerged as the definitive spelling by the mid 1850's. To avoid confusion, the term "Cahawba" is used throughout to refer to the town, except in official instances such as Cahaba Federal Prison.

## John Henley: A Gentleman and the River



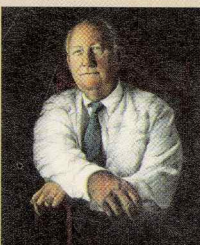
- **Henley on One of His Many Trips Down the River.** Taken in 1941.



- **Cahaba Lilies Blooming Near Piper.** Photo probably taken by Henley.



- **Leaf Illustration.** Copyright 1997 Guy Arello.

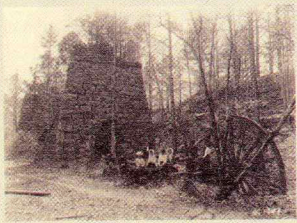


- **1990 Portrait.** Photograph of John C. Henley III by Beth Maynor Young, Hand Colored by Guy Arello.

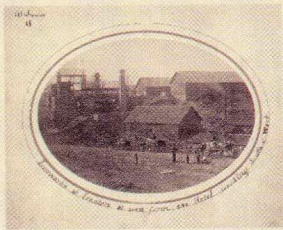


## From Blast Furnace to Steel Mills

All Piper photos courtesy of James H. Walker.



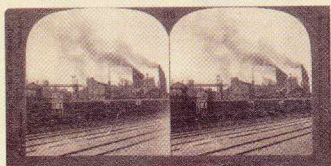
• **Tannehill Ruins.** Courtesy of the State of Alabama Department of Archives and History. A perfect place for a day trip after the Civil War, portions of the old furnace were taken by scavengers hunting for bricks. The photo shows a group sitting and leaning on the air pipe and gears near the 16-foot flywheel which remain where the steam engine once stood. By the 1940's, much of the old furnace machinery had been removed. In the 1960's, vandals inexplicably used dynamite on one of the furnaces and damaged a corner. After this destruction, the property was protected by the state.



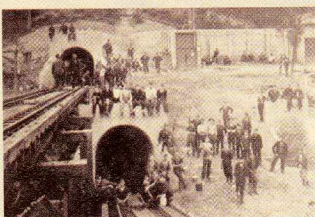
• **Ironton.** Courtesy of the State of Alabama Department of Archives and History. The first furnace built in Jefferson County, circa 1870.



• **Two Girls on the Cahaba River Near Piper.** Notice in the background of the photo the ferry hauling a car across the Cahaba River.



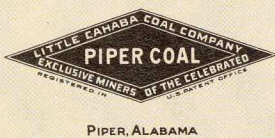
• **View of Ensley Furnace.** Courtesy of the State of Alabama Department of Archives and History. In 1888, Colonel Ensley began work on four blast furnaces each with a 200-ton daily capacity, making the group the largest in the world at the time. After Ensley's death in 1891, the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company took control of the operation. Two years after being incorporated in 1899, the city of Ensley grew from a pine barren of 600 inhabitants to an urban area of more than 10,000. By 1907, 14,000 men were employed at the Ensley mills.



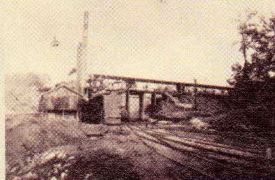
• **Marvel Mine.** The town of Marvel possessed a model commissary and water supply system for a mining community at that time. In addition, Marvel's schools had air shafts that brought cold air from the mines into the buildings, making then some of the first in the state to have air conditioning. Though the mining days are over, unlike Piper, the community of Marvel still survives.



• **Turtle Illustration.** Copyright 1997 Guy Arello.



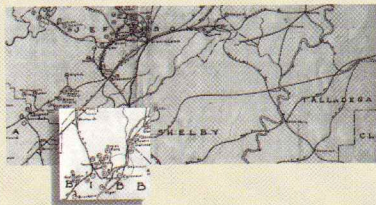
• **Piper Coal Letterhead.** This logo is taken from a 1940's billing statement from the Little Cahaba Coal Company.



• **Top House at Piper Mine #1.** Operational in 1901, Piper #1 was the first mine opened by the Little Cahaba Coal Company and could produce 250 tons a day. The top house burned in the mid-1930's and was completely rebuilt though the mine shaft had deteriorated to such an extent that by the time the top house was finished, the company decided it was not worth it to repair the shaft, and the mine was closed.



• **Piper football Team, 1933.** With only two playing fields for sports, football and baseball were played on one field and tennis and basketball on the other. Curiously enough, only the tennis/basketball court was provided with lighting for night games.



57, while number 17 shows an operation run by the Blocton-Cahaba Coal Company.



• **Piper-Coleman Trestles.** Piper resident Walter Gardner remembers that the area between the two trestles was where church meetings and carnivals often took place. Also, a walk across required careful attention so that an oncoming train did not take one by surprise.

## The Struggle for Cahaba River Preservation



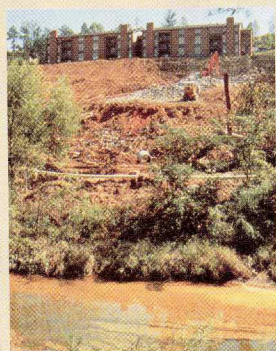
• **Drinking Water.** Copyright 1997 Beth Maynor Young.



one of the most diverse set of shoals with regards to snail, mussel, and fish populations, not to mention sheer beauty.



• **Hydrolic Below the Diversion Dam near Highway 280.** Photo courtesy of Joe Songer. Occurring just below the dam itself, the hydrolic traps trash moving down the river, giving some indication of how we have abused our drinking water source.



• **Erosion from Construction Along Cahaba River.** Copyright 1991 Beth Maynor. One of the river's greatest threats is the pollutant dirt stemming from such development in the basin.



• **Long-eared Sunfish.** Eyeing a wetfly, this male exhibits spring spawning colors.



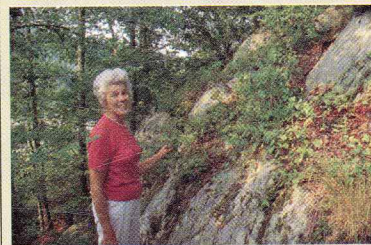
• **Illegal Untreated Sewage Overflow on Hurricane Creek.** Taken in 1995, this overflow problem has been eliminated due to the Cahaba River Society-led citizen efforts to improve sewage conditions.



• **Girl in Canoe.** Copyright 1993 Beth Maynor. Photo of Lizzy Haddock on the last day of a week-long winter canoe trip on the Cahaba.



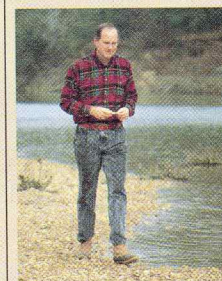
• **Mary Burks.** Copyright 1997 Beth Maynor Young.



• **Weesie Smith.** Copyright 1991 Beth Maynor.



• **John Randolph.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor.



• **Thomas Wilson.** Copyright 1990 Beth Maynor.

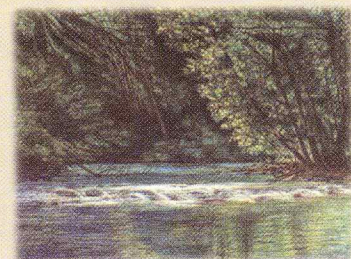


• **Don Elder.** Copyright 1993 Beth Maynor.



• **Beth Stewart.** Copyright 1997 Beth Maynor Young.

## Epilogue



• **Illustration.** Copyright 1997 Guy Arello.



# Cahaba Trace Commission Sites

## St. Clair County



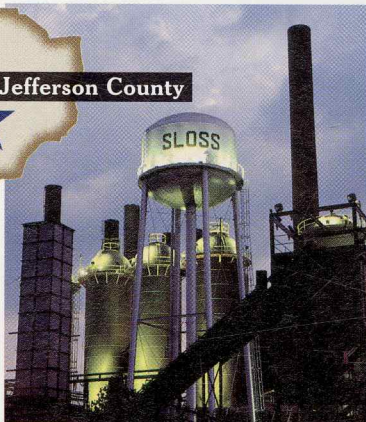
### St. Clair Courthouse at Ashville

Ashville, a sleepy, quiet town set among the rolling hills of St. Clair County, greets visitors with beautiful antebellum and Victorian homes and the oldest courthouse still in use in the state of Alabama. By 1840, the original log courthouse was deemed inadequate for the growing county, and a special tax was levied to provide for a more permanent structure. Erected in 1844 of brick that was molded and fired on the town square, the building had four offices downstairs and a large courtroom upstairs. A note from the builder's ledger gives some indication of the price: "March 25, 1845. I built a courthouse in Ashville which has 155,640 brick which I am to pay Campbell Jefferson two dollars and fifty cents per thousand. Settled in full, June 4, 1845. Littleton Yarbrough" Modified in 1886, 1911, 1934, 1964, and finally in 1982, the Neoclassical-Revival enlargements maintained the graceful style present in the original. Today, the courthouse holds the Ashville Museum and Archives, a small library with records back to 1819, a century of newspapers, and a wealth of artifacts for the curious or serious genealogical researcher.

As one of 13 counties established in January, 1818 by the Territorial Legislature, St. Clair County is older than the state, and the many homes, businesses, and civic buildings in Ashville and in nearby Beaver Valley are nearly as old as Alabama, attesting to the area's early settlement. In fact, descendants of early Alabama pioneers from the 1820's can still be found living in the homes of their ancestors, the original homesteaders. In Ashville, the John Washington Inzer Confederate Museum, a one-story Greek Revival maintained by Chapter 308 of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, holds invaluable documents and articles from the Confederate period of Alabama history. Restaurants and antique stores surround the square, and the Roses and Lace Country Inn, built in the 1880's, serves tourists as a bed and breakfast. Nearby historical sites of interest include the John Looney House Pioneer Museum, an 1820 two-story double-dogtrot home that is the only such restored building still standing in Alabama.

For more information, contact the Ashville Museum and Archives, St. Clair County Courthouse, P.O. Box 1570, Ashville, AL 35953. (205) 594-2128. Open Monday through Friday, regular hours are 8 a.m. until noon, and 1 to 5 p.m. No admission. St. Clair County Tourism, 107 Courthouse, P.O. Box 955, Ashville, AL 35953. (205) 594-2116. Open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to noon, and 1 to 3 p.m. Closed Wednesday.

## Jefferson County



### Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark

It is one of the more perfect ironies in Birmingham's history that the furnace that turned the sleepy village of Elyton into the largest industrial metropolis in the New South is now a museum dedicated to telling the story of Alabama's largest city as well as the South's industrial heritage. In 1881, James Withers Sloss, an Irish farmer's son from North Alabama, founded the Sloss Furnace Company, realizing the enormous potential the town possessed as an iron-making center. Soon one in four citizens worked the furnaces, and by 1898 Birmingham was the world's third largest exporter of pig iron. Entire communities organized around the industry. Iron flowed in the Magic City's veins.

Expansion continued into the 20th century, and by 1931 the original furnaces at the Sloss complex were dismantled and replaced by the ones at the present site. As

technology improved, the furnaces and surrounding processes were modernized until 1971 when the furnaces were finally closed. Facing the possible dismantlement of the complex, citizens organized and by 1983, Sloss Furnace Historic Landmark opened to the public. Today, the old furnaces, smokestacks, stoves, and cast sheds still ring out with activity as jazz and rock concerts, folk festivals, and numerous events are held at the site, carrying on Birmingham's rich cultural traditions. People come to learn about iron and the men who helped build Birmingham. Sloss Furnaces, a historical symbol of Birmingham's past, is educating and entertaining a whole new generation of visitors to the Steel City.

For more information, contact Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, First Avenue North & 32nd Street, P.O. Box 11781, Birmingham, AL 35202. (205) 324-1911. Open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday noon to 4 p.m. No admission.

## Shelby County



### Old Courthouse, Columbiana

Columbiana's old courthouse is a grand structure, and as in St. Clair County, Shelby County's first courthouse was a log cabin. Built in Shelbyville, the cabin courthouse was 24 x 20 feet, built for \$53 by Alabama's first secretary of state, Thomas A. Rogers. In 1826, the county seat was moved to Columbiana, and in a fit of enthusiasm, the citizens of the young town bore holes in an old pine tree in the center of town, filling it with gunpowder and setting it ablaze. Fortunately, things are quieter now in Columbiana. An imposing new courthouse was built in 1907, leaving the earlier, 19th-century structure the perfect home to both the Shelby County Museum and Archives and the Shelby County Historical Society.

Used as a library, draft board, agricultural department, city hall, and even a boarding house since the courthouse closed in 1907, the building has served the community's needs. While those with a connection to Shelby County use the archives to trace their family history, the museum is full of charming articles from the county's colorful past such as Victorian dresses, medical items from the 19th and early 20th centuries, Civil War artifacts, farm equipment, even mining cars and tools from the nearby Shelby Ironworks. Upstairs, the old courtroom is striking to the first-time visitor: 12 double-hung windows allow abundant natural light inside, illuminating the room's pleasing symmetry and proportions. Ancient, small burn marks scar the floor, perhaps left by some cigar-smoking citizen from the last century who fell asleep during legal proceedings. Though the large double doors of the old courthouse open directly onto Main Street and offer a view of the stately 1907 courthouse, the newer building is finally no match for the historical beauty and charm of the older structure.

In addition to the courthouse, Columbiana is home to the Smith-Harrison Museum's Washington-Custis Artifacts. Thanks to a sixth generation granddaughter of Martha Washington who lived in Shelby County, the museum houses the largest collection of George Washington memorabilia outside of Mount Vernon. The collection is located in the Mildred B. Harrison Library, just behind the new courthouse at 50 Lester Street. The hours are Monday through Friday 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. For more information, call (205) 669-4545.

For more information, contact the Shelby County Museum and Archives, 1854 Courthouse, P.O. Box 457, Columbiana, AL 35051. (205) 669-3912. Open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. No admission.

## Tuscaloosa County



### Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park

When Daniel Hillman came from Pennsylvania and built a small forge along Roupes Creek's banks, he knew he was on to something. Around the forge he found the richest deposits of brown ore he had ever seen. A few years later Ninian Tannehill, a cotton planter, took over the operation, and after passing through various owners, the forge grew into three tall furnaces during the Civil War. Tannehill No. 1 as it was called, produced 20 tons of pig iron a day at its height. After Union cavalry destroyed the operation in 1865, the site lay dormant for nearly 100 years, and grass, weeds, and trees covered the lonely old furnace until the Alabama Legislature declared it a state memorial park in 1969.

Today Tannehill is alive again with activity. More than 1,500 acres are preserved for hiking, camping, and recreation. Beautiful old cabins and homes from as far back as 1834 are on display to visitors, and many are available for overnight rental. Situated on a secluded hill, the one-room 1905 Kimbrell Methodist Church is a popular site for weddings. Craft shops occupy restored pioneer cabins where artisans display their time-honored skills. An Iron and Steel Museum displays numerous artifacts from Alabama's 19th-century iron industry, and of course there are the inspiring, massive stone furnaces that are the focus of any visit to the park.

Quite simply, there is too much to do and see at Tannehill for just one trip. Horseback rides, a miniature railroad churning through the woods, a pioneer farm, and even an old grist mill are there for the inquisitive. And the third Saturday of each month, from March through November, bargain hunters from all over the state and beyond make the pilgrimage to the park for Tannehill Trade Days. Whether it is tools, clothing, antiques, knick-knacks, or a quiet walk through Alabama history, the smart swappers and visitors know they can find it all at Tannehill.

For more information, contact Tannehill Ironworks State Historical Park, 12632 Confederate Parkway, McCalla, AL 35111. (205) 477-5711. Open 365 days a year, 7 a.m. to sunset. Admission.

## Hale County



### Moundville Archaeological Park

Called the "Big Apple of the 14th century" by scholars, at its height in A.D. 1300, Moundville had a population of as many as 1,500 and was the continent's largest single community north of Mexico. As many as 10,000 people lived in surrounding satellite villages and farms that offered tribute to the Moundville ceremonial complex. In the walled city itself, more than two dozen large earthworks were topped by temples, council houses, and homes of the Mississippian Indian nobility. At the time, Moundville was a ceremonial and commercial center whose trade routes stretched across the entire Southeastern United States. Situated along a fertile bluff of the Black Warrior River, the site is one of the few locations in the river valley not prone to flooding, making it ideal to support a large agricultural population.

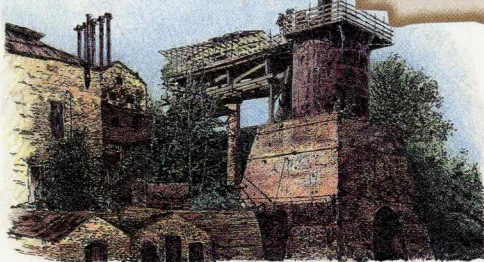
Currently, Moundville Archaeological Park preserves 320 acres of what was the most powerful Native American community of its time, providing an intimate glimpse into a highly developed culture. As part of the University of Alabama Museums, the park greets visitors with a reconstructed temple on the summit of the Ceremonial Mound, one of the tallest Mississippian mounds in the Southeast. The direct beneficiary of decades of exhaustive excavations and research, the Jones Archaeological Museum houses an excellent collection of Mississippian artwork taken from the site, including the Rattlesnake Disc, Alabama's official state artifact. Each fall beginning the last Monday in September, the annual Moundville Native American Festival attracts thousands of people from across the region for a week-long celebration of the heritage of Southeastern Indians. It's just one of many events Moundville Archaeological Park offers year-round. But for many, the highlight of the park is simply the chance to wander among the grass-covered mounds, lost in imagining what life may have been like in Alabama 500 to 1,000 years ago.

For more information, contact Moundville Archaeological Park, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0340. (205) 371-2234 or 371-2572. The park is open daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. except for major holidays. The Jones Museum is open Monday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission.



## Bibb County

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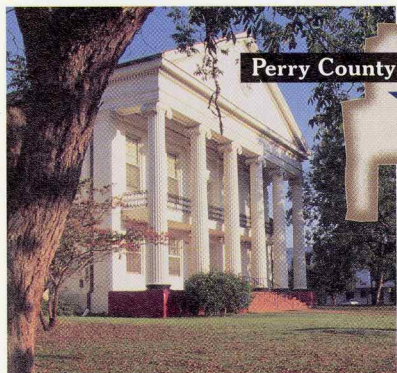
### Brierfield Ironworks Historical State Park

In 1862, construction began along a stream soon to be known as Furnace Branch by a group calling themselves the Bibb County Iron Company. By 1863, their furnace was so successful, the Confederate government attempted to purchase the plant for an iron-starved South. When the owners refused, a "forced sale" was ordered by the government for \$600,000 in Confederate money, and expansion began immediately in the form of Bibb No. 2, a large brick furnace outfitted with a hot blast. The wartime output of Brierfield, soon to be known only as the Bibb Naval Furnace, was sent directly to the Selma Arsenal to be used in plates for gunboats or cast into large naval ordinance. But the Union knew of the plant's high output, nearly 25 tons daily, and on March 31, 1865—the same day Tannehill Ironworks was hit—the Federal Tenth Missouri Cavalry left Montevallo and in the early hours of the day, burned the works.

For a time in the 1880's, Brierfield was active again, thanks to the financial backing to Thomas Jefferson Peter, and Brierfield was nicknamed the "Magic City of Bibb County." But by the end of the decade, the industrial city of Birmingham could make 10 times as much iron per day as the outdated Brierfield furnace. Soon even Peter abandoned the old furnace, and the woods overtook the site. Now a historical state park, the site is a living history with pioneer cabins and other restored buildings from Alabama's past. One of the more awe-inspiring features of the park is the old furnace itself. Nothing remains today save the crumbling red brick ruins of the once 60-foot tower that billowed smoke almost non-stop, but the sight still provokes wonder at the furnace's magnitude. Where 130 years ago every tree for miles in every direction was cut for charcoal, today tall pines and shady hardwoods provide a rustic setting for picnics, campers, or special events such as the annual Brierfield Music Festival the first weekend in May or the annual Civil War battle re-enactment.

The serene Mulberry Church is the frequent site for weddings, and the time-worn buildings and peaceful surroundings provide a popular spot for family reunions and gatherings of all kinds. Understandably, the swimming pool is the place to be during the warm summer months, but anytime year-round, the park literally abounds with history. Look no further than your feet. The park grounds are covered with small bits and pieces of slag from when the furnace was burning, little green, blue, black, yellow, and turquoise-hued reminders of the work of hundreds of people, now fragments of the past for those that visit Brierfield Ironworks.

For more information, contact Brierfield Ironworks Historical State Park, Route 1, Box 147, Brierfield, AL 35035. (205) 665-1856. The park is open 365 days a year, from sunrise to sunset. Admission.



## Perry County

7

Perry County Courthouse  
Marion

In so many ways, Marion is the town we all wish we had grown up in: a small but diverse, close-knit community of friends, steeped in history, abounding with beautiful old homes, and possessing a downtown square and courthouse just the way it should be. Nearly as old as the state, the town of Marion is named for Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox" of the American Revolution. Boasting one of America's oldest colleges for women, Judson College, which was established in 1839, as well as Marion Military Institute, formed three years later, Marion was one of the leading centers of learning in Alabama in the mid-19th century. With such an attraction, by the 1840's Marion was thriving, the county seat and a commercial center for merchants and cotton planters in the Black Belt agricultural region. In fact, when Montgomery was named in 1846 as the permanent capital of Alabama, Marion was considered a rival for nomination.

But even without considering the rich historical lega-

cy of Marion, simply driving down the streets and back alleys of this charming town is like a balm for those weary of strip malls and other signs of modernity. Every turn reveals a new discovery: one of more than 100 grand antebellum homes and churches; the Lincoln Normal School, one of the first black schools of higher learning in Alabama; a Civil War cemetery set amid graceful, ancient oaks; the Alabama Military Hall of Honor museum; the Marion Military Institute Chapel used as a hospital during the Civil War; the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame at Judson College; and finally, the Myrtle Hill Bed and Breakfast which symbolizes the elegance and charm of Marion. A Greek Revival mansion built in 1840, Myrtle Hill gracefully greets visitors lingering in town after a day's sightseeing and shopping in the many fine antique stores Marion has to offer. Marion is a beautiful glimpse into Alabama's past.

For more information, contact the Perry County Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 951, Marion, AL 36756, (334) 683-9622 or The Perry County Historical and Preservation Society, P.O. Box 257, Marion, AL 36756. (334) 683-6521.



## Dallas County

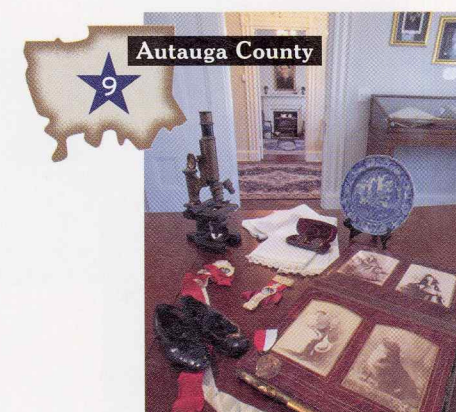
8

### Selma/Dallas County Museum of History and Archives

Gracefully housed in the Old Depot, the Selma/Dallas County Museum of History and Archives offers a wealth of information, articles, and items from the Black Belt region, Dallas County, and specifically Selma's past. The 1891 railway depot, one of only 12 such structures in the Southeast, features exhibits ranging from prehistoric Native Americans to the Gulf War. One of the museum's most impressive collections is found in the Black History Wing. The photographs of Mary Morgan Keipp, taken from the 1890's to 1905, marvelously record rural black culture among the Black Belt plantations of the time. Another room houses a wide array of Civil War weapons, documents, currency, and munitions from the Greater Confederate Naval Ordinance Works. Others hold a Transportation and Industry room with part of the city's first bank; antique furnishings and Victorian clothing; tools and instruments from the late 18th century; as well as a folk items. And in a new addition, an outbuilding is home to a remarkable 1852 brass pump carriage used to put out fires, a 1926 fire engine, and various firefighting articles from Selma history. From wood carvings and WPA murals from the Great Depression to walls of vintage photographs, the museum presents a varied portrait of Selma and surrounding Dallas County over the years.

For those interested in Selma's role during the civil rights movement, several attractions stand out. Historic Water Avenue, the world-famous Edmund Pettus Bridge, and the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute are all located within a short walking distance and together tell the story of a vital part of Selma and the nation's turbulent history. The headquarters for the 1965 voting rights march, the nearby Brown Chapel AME Church, holds a special monument to King. A self-guided Martin Luther King, Jr. walking tour is also available for visitors. But no visit to Selma is complete without seeing Old Cahawba, the site of Alabama's first permanent state capital, now a major archaeological site and interpretive park located 12 miles outside of town.

For more information, contact the Selma/Dallas County Museum of History and Archives, 4 Martin Luther King Street, Selma, AL 36701. (334) 874-2197. Open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday by appointment. Admission. Dallas County Chamber of Commerce, 513 Lauderdale Street, Selma, AL 36702. (334) 875-7241 or 1-800-45-SELMA.



## Autauga County

9

### Heritage Center/Prattaugan Museum

Located in the immaculately restored McWilliams-Smith-Rice house in downtown Prattville, the Heritage Center operates simultaneously as a museum, archives, and visitor information center. Built in 1848, the house has deep roots in the town's history, being home to the man who named the town and the location where the Prattville Dragoons, a Civil War unit, formed in 1861. Today the home provides offices for the Autauga County Heritage Association, the Autauga Genealogical Society, and the Historic Prattville Redevelopment Authority. In April 1996, the museum opened its doors to the public after repairs and renovation.

Though young, the Prattaugan Museum holds many artifacts and memorabilia associated with the town and early days of Autauga County, founded in 1818 just prior to statehood. Portraits of notable people from the county's past, old photographs, an impressive Indian artifact room, Civil War memorabilia, pioneer items, and more give a glance into what life was like in Prattville in years past. The Autauga County Archives contains local and family histories, genealogies, hundreds of reference books, newspapers, and a computer data base with more than 100,000 records. The Little House, a small outbuilding, was constructed by the house's previous owner, Amos Smith, who believed that "boys and dogs belong in the yard." Accordingly, Smith built the house for his rambunctious children. Today it is available for small group meetings. As a visitor welcoming center, the Heritage Center has plenty of maps, brochures, books, and gifts for the traveler. And be sure to take a drink of water behind the house at the old artesian well, still flowing with pure, clear water.

Beyond the Heritage Center, there is plenty to do and see in this charming 1839 New England style village set in the Deep South. The birthplace of industry in Alabama, Prattville's founding father, Daniel Pratt, came from New Hampshire in 1833 and established a gin factory along Autauga Creek. He then acquired 2,000 acres and created an entire town modeled after those he was familiar with back home. Pratt and his town became a tremendous success, although his high quality fabric was not successful in the local area until a superintendent came up with the scheme to stamp the material with a foreign name, ship it to New York then back to Alabama. Today, the Prattville area is best known for its many historic attractions and structures such as Buena Vista, an 1822 Greek Revival plantation house. And more than 150 years after Daniel Pratt manufactured his first cotton gin, the factories in Prattville are still making gins today, shipping them all over the world.

For more information, contact The Heritage Center, Prattaugan Museum, 102 East Main Street, Prattville, AL 36067. (334) 361-0961. Open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the first and third Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. No admission.



## Lowndes County

10

Alabama's first state capital dome in Lowndesboro  
Hayneville

The first settlers entered what was to become Hayneville in 1820 from South Carolina, stopping at an area called Big Swamp. By 1830 when the growing village of Big Swamp became the county seat, the name was understandably changed to Hayneville in honor of Robert Young Hayne, a U.S. Senator and governor from South Carolina. Though the first courthouse was built around 1831 and had 2-foot-thick brick walls, within 20 years it was declared unsafe. Finished in 1858, the second Lowndes County Courthouse is now the focal point of the quiet but charming town of Hayneville.

Along with the courthouses in Ashville and Marion, the the Lowndes County Courthouse is one of only four antebellum structures built as a courthouse and still in use today. Facing west overlooking the court square, the two-story structure reflects the tremendous plantation-based wealth of antebellum Lowndes County. Built in the Greek Revival style, the building's most striking feature is the raised portico on the front and the pair of curving stairways on each side of the podium's base. Four fluted Doric columns and a domed cupola added during renovations in 1906 further lend an imposing air to the beautiful structure.

Just across U.S. Highway 80 lies the town of Lowndesboro, a treasure-trove of old homes dating back to pre-statehood. Settled in 1815, the names of many of these first families can still be heard in Lowndesboro today. While most of the homes are private residences, a drive through town will not go unrewarded. Oakview



Cemetery, located on a shady rise on the north side of the town, contains at least two daughters of the American Revolution. Among the numerous beautiful churches built during the last century in Lowndesboro, the now-abandoned St. James Christian Methodist Episcopal Church stands out for the striking contrast of the simple, elegant grandeur of its conception and the poor condition it exists in today. One of the oldest extant houses of worship in Alabama, St. James is included on the Alabama Historical Commission's list of endangered historic landmarks. Deeded to a group of former slaves in the 1880's, the church is topped with the copper-plated ogee-roofed dome from the first state capital in Cahawba, the only known remains of the statehouse.

For more information, contact the Cahaba Trace Commission Office, Brierfield Ironworks Historical Park, Route 1, Box 147, Brierfield, AL 35035. Tel/Fax (205) 665-7982.



Old Alabama Town

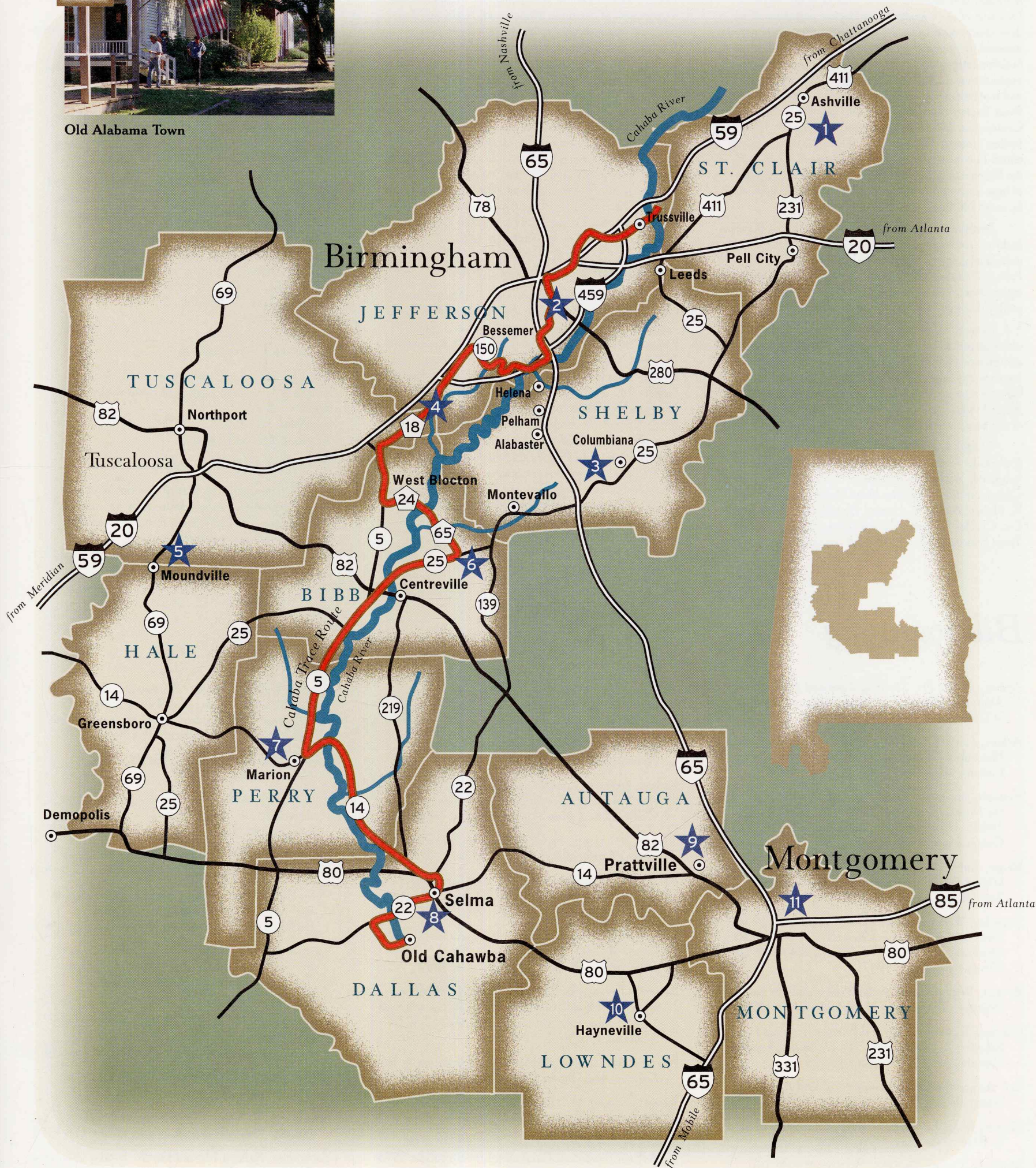
Old Alabama Town is the closest thing it gets to living, breathing, and working in 19th-century Alabama. The South's premier historical village, Old Alabama Town contains over five blocks and 41 buildings ranging from a modest pole barn to an imposing Greek Revival mansion with Italianate influences. By far the best way to learn what life was like in the 1800's, the trip through the town begins at the reception center where films, exhibits, and maps prepare your journey. Tours are divided into two sections, "Working in the 19th Century" and "Living in the 19th Century."

The work tour begins in the Rose-Morris Crafts House, an I-house with an open dogtrot, with a dulcimer shop and leathercraft room where artisans display their wares. Next, weavers display their work in a kitchen cottage, followed by a blacksmith shop, a plantation office that acts as a woodcarver's shop, a drug store museum, and a turn-of-the-century cotton gin. The living tour begins at the Lucas Tavern, built in the early 19th century along the Federal Road, a major route for Alabama settlers, located just east of Montgomery. Other sites on the tour include a dog-trot house, an 1874 meeting house, an extravagant old carriage house, a shotgun house, an 1892 corner grocery, a black Presbyterian church, a one-room school house, an 1820's log cabin and more. And throughout Old Alabama Town, guides and volunteers often dress the part of a 19th-century blacksmith, artisan, or any other role they

play to further the experience and educational opportunities offered by the facility.

Developed by the City of Montgomery and the Landmarks Foundation, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to leading the preservation movement in the capital city, Old Alabama Town opened in 1971. Since then, the site has expanded rapidly. Open 361 days a year for interpretative tours, the educational programs for adults and children alike are a major component of the project's mission. Some 30,000 students participate annually in on-site and special outreach activities such as a craft program with a dulcimer maker, wood carvers, a blacksmith, spinners, and weavers. For a clear example of how much work the Landmarks Foundation has done at Old Alabama Town preserving the past for the present generation, one need look no further than the fact that they have restored 41 houses and buildings from the 19th century in 30 years, averaging more than one a year—a tremendous achievement that all Alabamians can be proud of and enjoy.

For more information, contact Old Alabama Town, 301 Columbus Street, Montgomery, AL 36104. (334) 240-4617 or toll free 1-888-240-1850. Opens Monday through Saturday at 9 a.m., last tour begins at 3:30 p.m. and opens Sunday at 1 p.m., last tour begins at 3:30 p.m. Admission.



Shown in red on the map above, the Cahaba Trace Route was officially designated by a joint House/Senate resolution sponsored by Senator Walter Owens of Centreville. Passing through the historic Cahaba River Valley, the Trace meanders about the Cahaba River (shown in blue), presenting the visitor a glimpse into the region's heritage. With a goal to connect the Old South with the New, the Cahaba Trace Route runs from Trussville's Cahaba River Park, through Birmingham to Bessemer, past Tannehill and West Blocton, and on to Brierfield and then Centreville. From there the Trace passes through Marion and ends at Old Cahawba, Alabama's first permanent state capital.



### **Designer/Publisher, Guy Arello**

A graphic designer and illustrator, Guy Arello has long been committed to environmental issues in Alabama, especially the protection of the Cahaba River. As a publisher, Arello is working to help foster a more positive image of Alabama in various media whether in the realm of state heritage, civil rights, or the environment. It is his belief that quality of design, photography, illustration, and writing culminate by leading the reader into an exciting adventure. The *Cahaba Folio* serves as an example that such a collaboration is possible.

## Acknowledgements

Guy Arello, Designer/Illustrator—As a designer, never have I been so blessed to have the opportunity to work on such a project where writers, photographers, historians, designers, and production staff could pour their all into creating this rendering of the Cahaba River and the valley that bears its name. Thanks to the Board of Directors of the Cahaba River Society and the staff for their efforts developing the CRS into an organization of national prominence with its cutting-edge, consensus-building approach to river protection. Few environmental organizations in the country could produce such a folio, and it serves as just one more example of what the Cahaba River Society can achieve. Thanks also the Cahaba Trace Commission and to all those working along the Trace to further promote Alabama's rich historical legacy. For its efforts to connect preservation with economic progress, the Commission deserves credit for setting an example of how some of our state's most important treasures may be saved for future generations to enjoy.

Distributed all over the state and country to libraries, archives, environmental groups, businesses, interested individuals, and more, it is our hope that the *Cahaba Folio* will enhance the dreams and aspirations of other environmentally and historically conscious people to realize that they can make a difference.

I would like to personally thank Todd Keith for his excellent researching and writing ability to turn scientific and historical detail into readable prose as well as creating copy capable of impact with the power to change the way people look at things. Also, my thanks to Beth Maynor Young for continuing to provide beautiful images of our scenic river.

Thanks to the following professionals who have generously worked to make this publication the highest in quality: Joe Rogers Studios in Nashville; Jerry Brown, Communication Arts; Strickland Paper Co., Inc.; Hal K. Huber; Arthur C. Henley, Birmingham Publishing Co.; Charles Barnette; Gilbert Johnson; Betsy Fleenor; Tricia Sheets; Linda Derry, Park Manager and Site

### **Project Editor, Todd Keith**

A free-lance writer, editor, and native Alabamian, Todd Keith has an abiding interest in Alabama history and in the preservation of wild and scenic places. Having taught English in Bratislava, Slovakia, he is attentive to the perception of Alabama abroad, and consequently works to tell the stories of the home he knows. This project has been the perfect opportunity for him to combine Alabama history and environmental heritage, literature, old maps, and a new found interest in canoeing.

Archaeologist for Old Cahawba, Alabama Historical Commission in Selma; Rickie Louise Brunner, Public Services Division of the State of Alabama Archives, Department of Archives and History; Yvonne Crumpler, Department Head of the Tutwiler Collection of Southern History and Literature at Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives; Ron Joulilian; Buddy Morgan, General Manager, Water Works Board & Sanitary Sewer Board, Montgomery; Jack Bergstresser; Spider Martin; Jeff Mansell; Chris Oberholster, Director of Science and Stewardship, The Nature Conservancy of Alabama; Dr. Mable B. Anderson, Chair of the Ensley/Moro Park/South Pratt Distressed Flood Victims Coalition; Bill Gilchrist, Director of the Department of Planning, Engineering, and Permits, Birmingham; Jim Lehe; James A. Walker for his Piper photos and his time; Alabama Secretary of State James R. Bennett; John Harris for his mussel photos; Walter Gardner, Jr.; Dana DiChiara; and Beth Stewart, Martin Everse, Julie Keith, Dan Ennis, and Laura Franck for their proofreading skills.

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### **Photographer, Beth Maynor Young**

The nature photographer who created Cahaba River Publishing, Beth Maynor Young is well-known for her work documenting some of the most scenic and unprotected spots in the country. One motivation driving her photography is the feeling that too often people do not realize the value of their own surroundings until it is captured in a more beautiful way. Recently, Young has been documenting natural areas where corporations have an environmental involvement. If there is a common thread linking her photography, it is the theme of stewardship and conservation.

Finally, thanks to Don Elder for his vision and pragmatic approach which formed and still infuses the Cahaba River Society with vigor.

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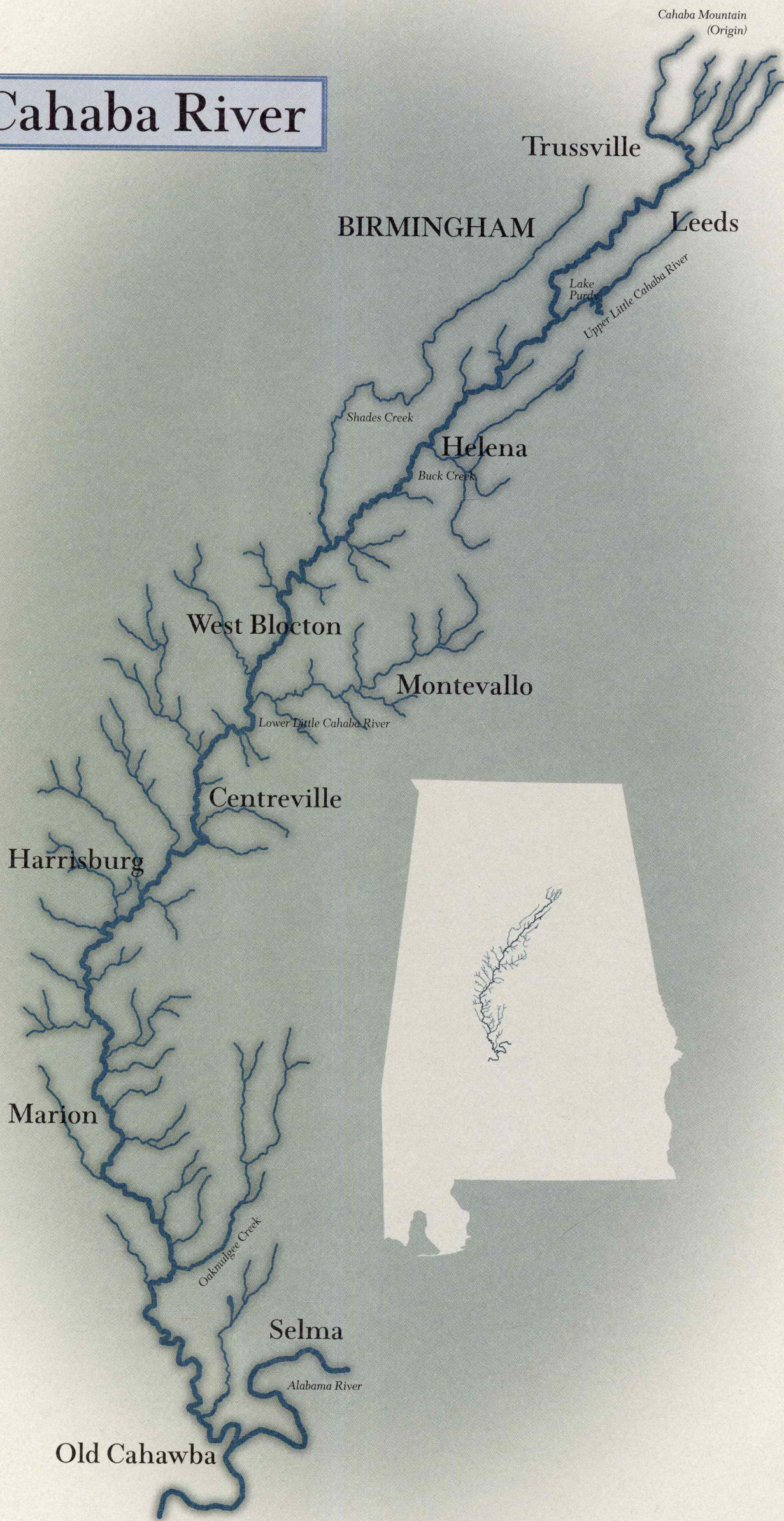
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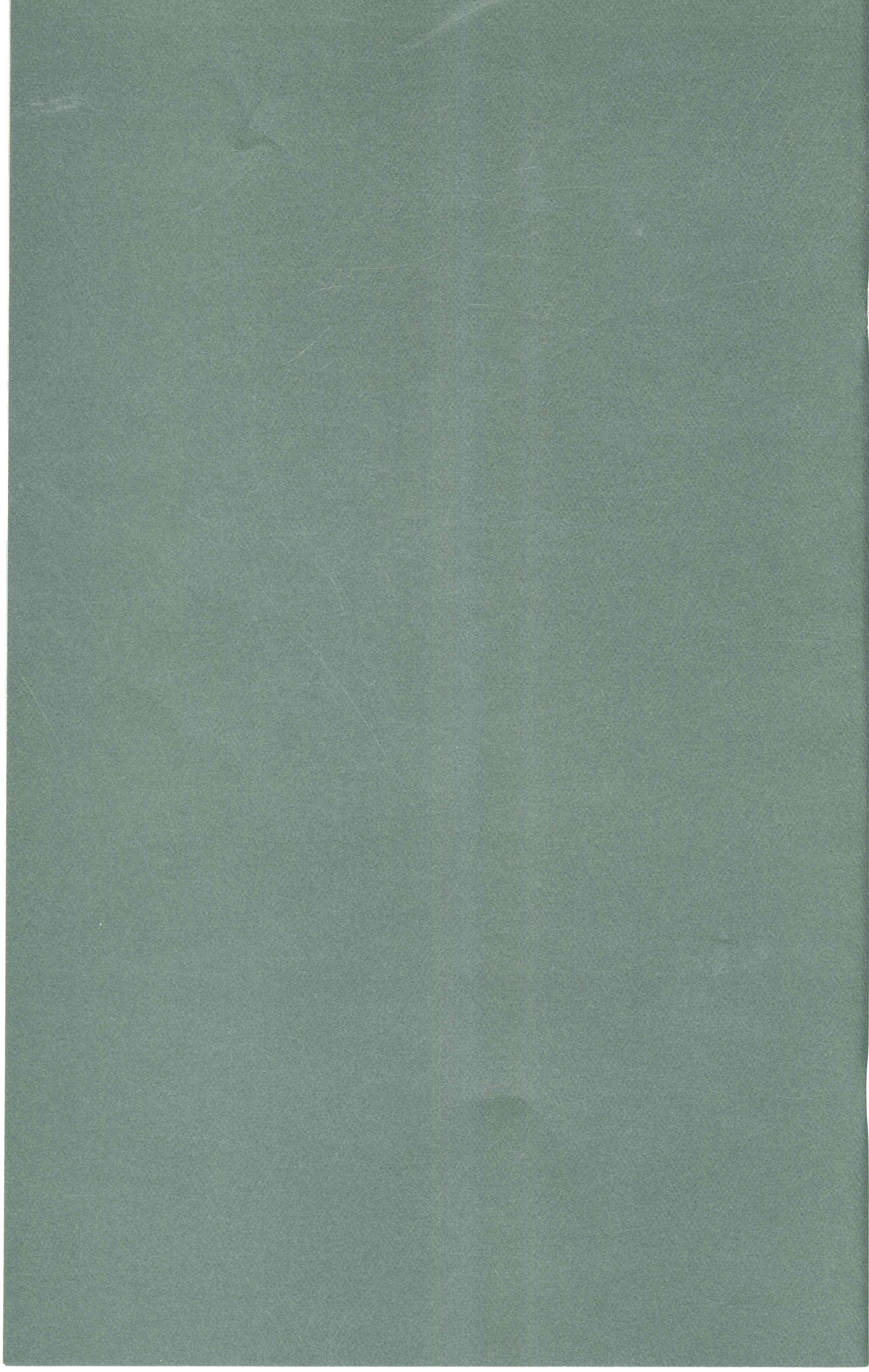
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# Cahaba River









de Chaves, Geronimo 1584

**Mitchell, John 1777**

This historical map, titled "Mitchell, John 1777", depicts the Southeastern United States. The map is oriented with North at the top. It shows the following regions and features:

- Regions:** CAROLINIAN SUPERIOR, CAROLINIAN MERIDIONAL, GEORGIA, and FLORIDA.
- Rivers:** MAJOR RIVERS include the SAVANNAH, OGECHIEE, and ALTAMAHA.
- Coastal Features:** The ATLANTIC OCEAN is shown to the east, with the FLORIDA BAY and GULF OF FLORIDA labeled.
- Scale:** A scale bar at the bottom left indicates distances in miles (0 to 100).
- Topography:** The map uses shading to represent elevation, with labels for "HIGHEST MOUNTAINS" and "LOWEST MOUNTAINS".
- Other Labels:** "INDIAN COUNTRY" is labeled in the northern part of the map, and "MEXICO" is labeled at the bottom.

This is a detailed historical map of the Mississippi Territory, showing its geographical features, major rivers, and surrounding territories. The map is titled "MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY" in a decorative box at the bottom right. It includes a scale bar for miles and a compass rose. The map shows the Mississippi River flowing from the north to the Gulf of Mexico, with various tributaries and settlements marked. Surrounding territories like Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia are also labeled.

A historical map of Alabama, titled "A NEW MAP of GEORGIA" and "Drawn from Original". The map shows the state of Alabama with its counties, major cities, and rivers. It includes a scale of miles and a compass rose. The map is labeled "ALABAMA" and "GEOGRAPHICAL".

A NEW MAP of GEORGIA with Part of CAROLINA FLORIDA and LOUISIANA.  
*Drawn from Original Drafts, & assisted by the most approved Maps and Charts.*  
*Collected by Euseb. Bowen Geographer to her Majesty.*

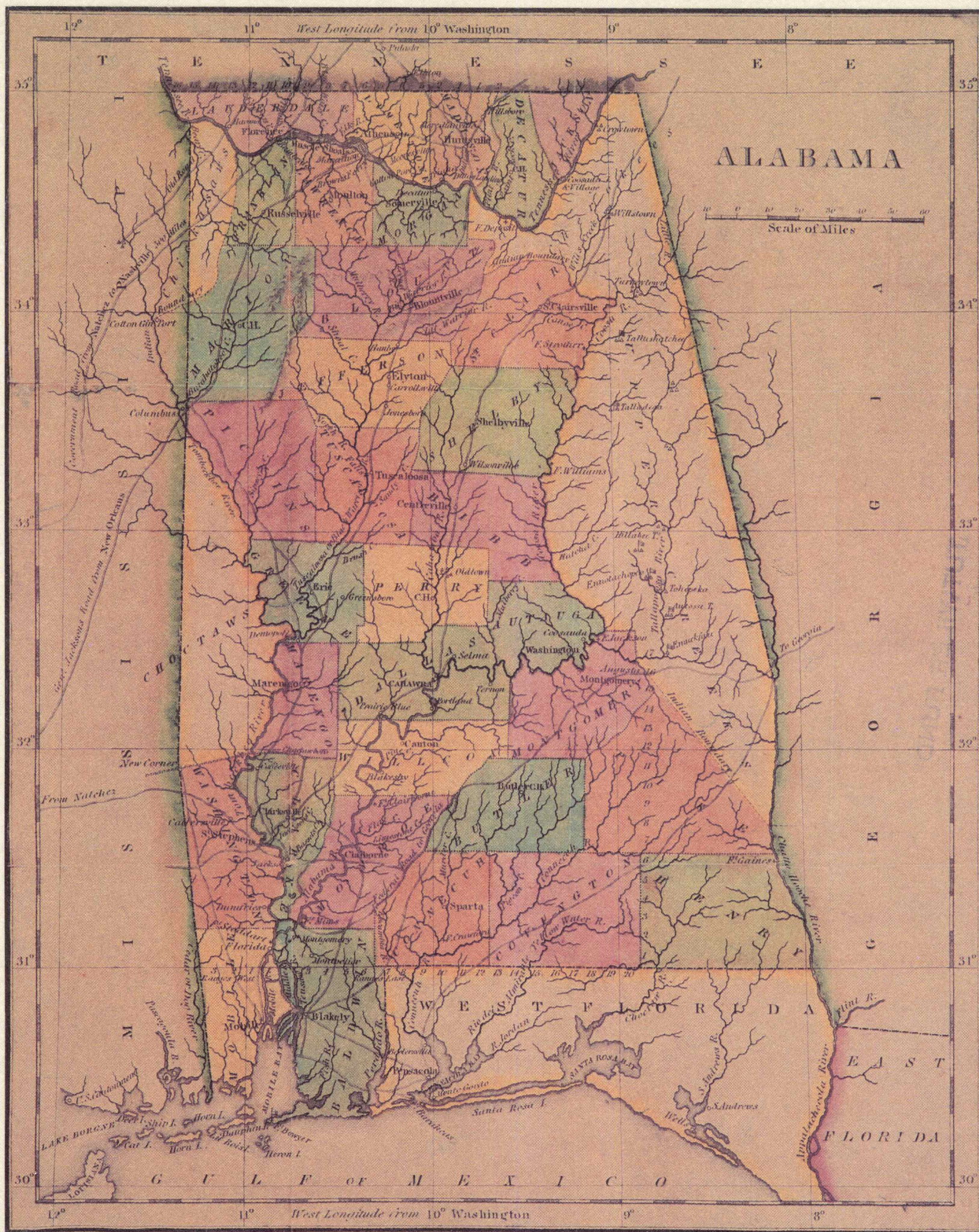
THE MAP displays the following geographical features and labels:

- Regions and Territories:** GEORGIA, PART OF CAROLINA, PART OF FLORIDA, PART OF LOUISIANA.
- Rivers and Waterways:** SAVANNAH RIVER, OGECHEE RIVER, ALTAMAHA RIVER, CATAHOCHUS RIVER, CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER, FLORIDA RIVER, ALBUQUERQUE RIVER, RIO GRANDE RIVER, MISSISSIPPI RIVER, GULF OF MEXICO.
- Coastal Features:** ATLANTIC OCEAN, GULF OF FLORIDA, GULF OF CALIFORNIA.
- Settlements and Towns:** SAVANNAH, AUGUSTA, MOUNTAIN VIEW, COLUMBIA, CHARLOTTE, NASHVILLE, MEMPHIS, JACKSONVILLE, TAMPA, MIAMI, KEY WEST, ST. AUGUSTINE, ST. PETERSBURG, PANAMA CITY, GULF BAY, PENSACOLA, MOBILE, BIRMINGHAM, ATLANTA, COLUMBIA, CHARLOTTE, NASHVILLE, MEMPHIS, JACKSONVILLE, TAMPA, MIAMI, KEY WEST, ST. AUGUSTINE, ST. PETERSBURG, PANAMA CITY, GULF BAY, PENSACOLA, MOBILE, BIRMINGHAM, ATLANTA.
- Geographical Markers:** MOUNTAIN VIEW, COLUMBIA, CHARLOTTE, NASHVILLE, MEMPHIS, JACKSONVILLE, TAMPA, MIAMI, KEY WEST, ST. AUGUSTINE, ST. PETERSBURG, PANAMA CITY, GULF BAY, PENSACOLA, MOBILE, BIRMINGHAM, ATLANTA.
- Map Elements:** A compass rose is located in the lower center of the map. The map is framed by a double-line border with latitude and longitude markings.



*Regional Maps of the Old Southwest*





## GEOGRAPHICAL, STATISTICAL AND HISTORICAL MAP OF ALABAMA

Lucas, Fielding

1781-1854

*Drawn by R. Lucas. B. Tanner, sc. [Philadelphia, Carey & Lea, 1822]*

Size: 11.5 x 9 in.

In 1800 Washington County was formed, making it the first organized in Alabama. Land offices opened in St. Stephens in 1803 and Huntsville in 1811 for the sale of public lands as people poured into the territory. At the request of President Thomas Jefferson, the Creek Nation granted the right of a horsepath across their country, a road that would eventually become the Federal Road connecting New Orleans to Washington, D.C. and providing for the overland delivery of mail. Following Washington County's lead, in 1808 Madison County was formed, followed by Baldwin, Clark, Mobile, and Monroe counties. From 1810 to 1820 the population of Alabama reached 127,901, a more than 1,000% increase. Nearby states understandably feared they were threatened with depopulation, and by 1830, the state of Alabama could claim over 300,000 citizens, far more than any other southwestern state.

In the Mississippi Territory, differences between early settlers along the Mississippi River and those Alabama settlers in Madison County and along the Tombigbee River increased. Since at least 1803, Alabama settlers had been lobbying Congress to divide the territory, complaining that the Western settlers

controlling Mississippi territorial government catered only to the needs of those living along the Mississippi River. When the burgeoning eastern population threatened to shift the balance of power from the west to the east, Mississippi politicians began to see the merit of dividing the territory. Also, two states would create more Southern votes in the U.S. Senate, already a concern in the South. One proposal divided the territory by an east-west line similar to Tennessee. Finally, Georgia senator Charles Tait's north-west division was accepted in 1817, and Mississippi became a state and Alabama, a territory. William Wyatt Bibb, a U.S. Senator from Georgia, became the territory's first governor and in a surprisingly short time, the state's first governor. On December 14, 1819, President James Monroe signed a resolution admitting Alabama as the 22nd state.

Fielding Lucas, a Virginian, helped compile *A Complete Historical Chronological and Geographical Atlas* which contained this 1822 Alabama map. Lucas prepared 20 maps for the atlas, some 40% of the total. By the time of publication, the new state of Alabama had 31 counties. Following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, a series of treaties with the Indians remaining in the state finalized Alabama's borders.

*Map courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History*

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# MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY

Lewis, Samuel

1754-1822

Drawn by S. Lewis, engr. by D. Fairman. [Philadelphia, Conrad & Co., 1804] Size: 8 x 10 in.

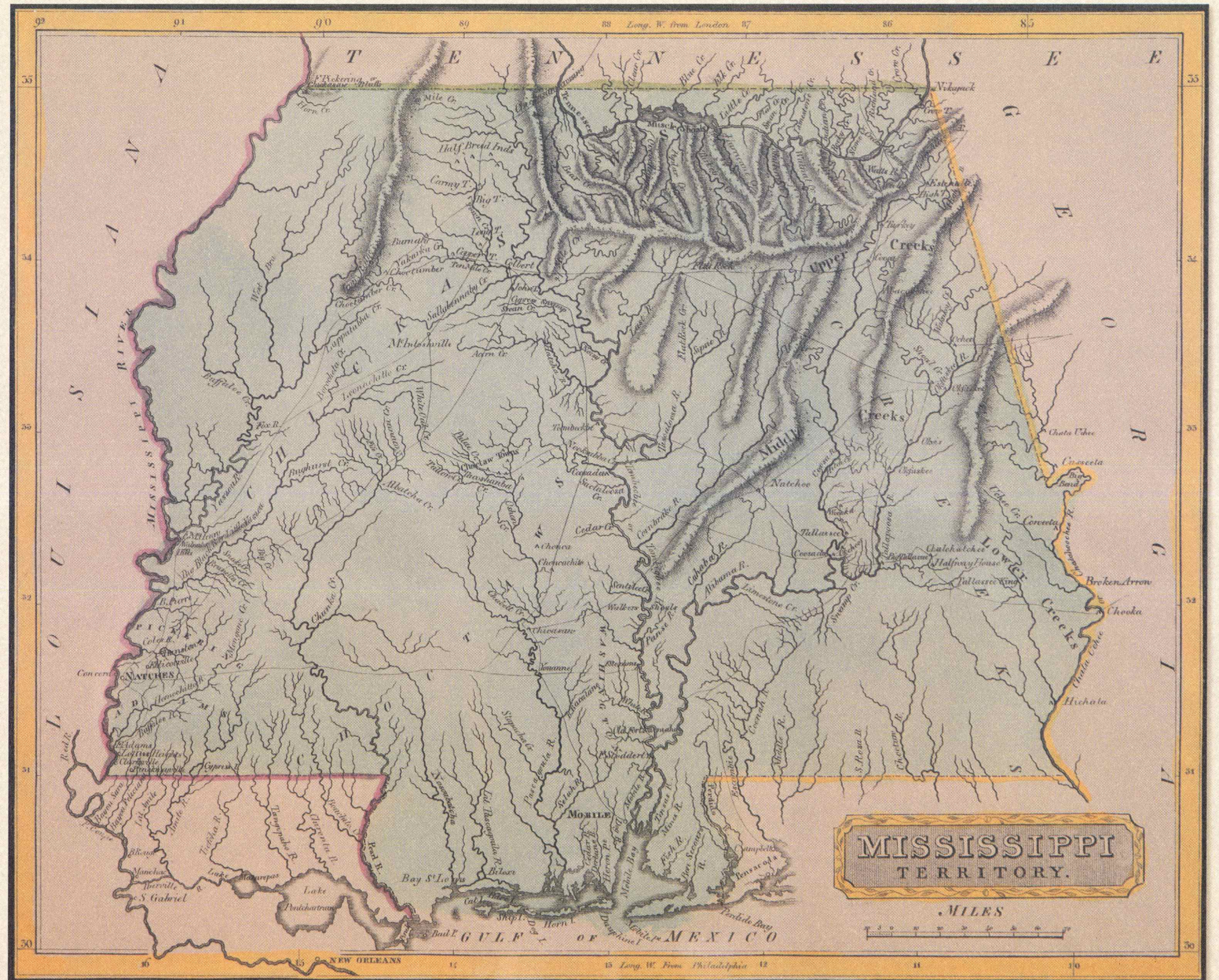
By the time of the American Revolution, present-day Alabama was a wilderness claimed by Georgia and largely controlled by the Creek Nation except for a stretch of coast called West Florida held by Great Britain. During the revolution, Spain entered the war against Britain, and the governor of New Orleans, Bernardo de Galvez, proceeded to capture Mobile, eventually controlling most entries into the Gulf of Mexico including the Chattahoochee, Alabama, and Mississippi Rivers. Once peace was established in 1783, Spain attempted to turn Alabama Indians against the American settlers. While the United States' western boundary was the Mississippi River, its southern boundary remained contested.

Alabama thus became the site of continuous intrigue as Spanish, British, and American forces sought to control the region by securing the loyalty of the Creeks. In 1795 the United States and Spain signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo, establishing the 31st parallel as the boundary between the two territories. In 1798 the federal government organized the Mississippi Territory as seen on this map encompassing both the present-day states of Mississippi and Alabama. But U.S. control over the territory was hampered by Georgia's illegal organization of the area into what it called "Bourbon County" and the 1789 sale of 15 million acres to three "Yazoo" speculative land companies. Though President Washington declared Georgia's land sales null and void, some speculators maintained their claims.

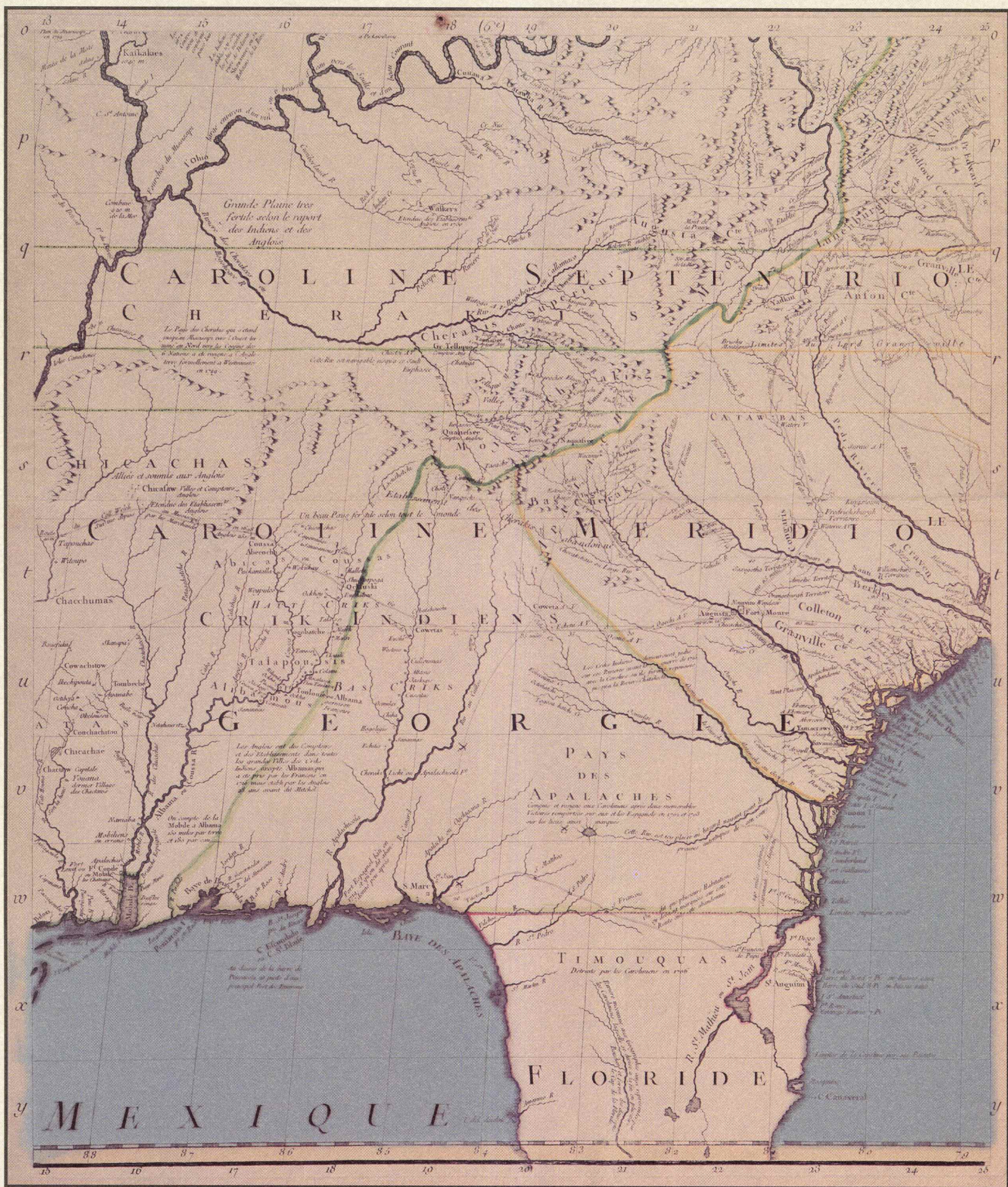
In a second Yazoo land sale, Georgia again tried to profit by selling more than 20 million acres in the Mississippi Territory for \$500,000. Settlers who bought land from speculators were left with bogus titles. By 1802 Georgia was persuaded to relinquish its claim to the territory on the condition that the state would be reimbursed \$1,250,000 by the federal government for expenses incurred against the Indians and Spaniards. In a spectacular bit of maneuvering, Napoleon pressured Spain into returning Louisiana to France in a secret treaty only to then sell it to the United States in 1803. Soon land cessions by the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees opened up large areas for settlement, and the resulting pressure on the Creek Nation resulted in violence. After the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1812, the Creeks were forced to give up land amounting to almost half the state of Alabama. And though allied tribes were promised a portion of their eastern territory, it would not be long before Alabama fever struck the nation and squatters would drive the remaining Indians off these lands.

During the early years following the American Revolution, there was considerable interest in atlas publication, particularly those that showed the expanding new country. Samuel Lewis, one of the earliest of a new breed of American commercial map publishers, made his first contribution to American cartography in 1795. Nine years later in a partnership with Aaron Arrowsmith, an English publisher of maps and atlases, Lewis completed A New and Elegant General Atlas, Comprising All the New Discoveries, to the Present Time; Containing Sixty-three Maps. All the American maps were drawn by Lewis, including this 1804 Mississippi Territory map.

Map courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History  
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## A MAP OF THE BRITISH AND FRENCH DOMINIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

**Mitchell, John**

**1711-1768**

*Amerique Septentrionale avec les routes, distances en miles, villiages, et etablissemens Francois et Anglois, par le Docteur [John] Mitchel. Traduit de l'Anglois. Corrigée en 1776 par M. Hawkins. A Paris, le Rouge, 1777. Size: 66 x 47 cm. [French edition of John Mitchell's A Map of the British and French Dominions in North America with Roads, Distances, Limits and Extent of the Settlements, 1755 (8 sheets)]*

After the defeat of the Spanish Armada by the British in 1588, the 72-year reign of Louis XIV marked the culmination of a French-dominated century. With colonial gains in Canada and penetration into Spanish Florida, France began to establish a foothold in the Alabama wilderness. In 1682 Robert Cavalier floated down the Mississippi River, naming the land for his king. When Mobile was founded in 1702 as the capital of Louisiana, the French claim embraced half the continent. Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, governor of Louisiana, played a vital role in establishing French influence in the Gulf of Mexico. Able to speak several Indian languages, Bienville won the friendship of the Choctaws, making alliances with the Indians that proved crucial to French survival, caught as they were between English and Spanish forces.

By the time Fort Toulouse was firmly established at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers, the War of Spanish Succession (known as Queen Anne's War

in the colonies) left France in heavy debt and severely weakened Louis XIV's ability to colonize Louisiana. The crown thus leased Louisiana to finance the France's debt. In the meantime, Bienville, relieved of his position as governor, founded New Orleans in 1718 which soon became the capital. In 1731 Louisiana reverted to the crown, and in typical fashion, Bienville became the governor of the territory again.

But even as Fort Tombecbé was established, the end of French influence in Alabama was imminent. John Mitchell, a Virginian physician, chemist, biologist, and botanist of note, emigrated to England in 1746 due to ill health. At the request of the Earl of Halifax, in 1755 Mitchell made the famous "Map of the British and French Dominions in North America" which was used in peace negotiations between Britain and the American colonies in 1782-83 that defined the shape of the emergent United States of America. Remarkably, it remains the only map Mitchell is known to have made. The present map is only one sheet out of eight prepared for a 1777 French edition. Published in 21 editions over the next 25 years, the Mitchell map had an enormous influence on cartographers. As late as 1843 it was still regarded as an accurate, reliable map. It has been called the most important map in U.S. history.

Map courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives

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*A NEW MAP of GEORGIA, with Part of CAROLINA, FLORIDA and LOUISIANA.*

*Drawn from Original Draughts, assisted by the most approved Maps and Charts.*

Collected by **Eman. Bowen** Geographer to His Majesty.



A NEW MAP  
OF GEORGIA WITH PART  
OF CAROLINA, FLORIDA  
AND LOUISIANA

**Bowen, Emanuel**

1714-1767

*Drawn from Original Draughts assisted by the most approved Maps and Charts. Collected by Eman: Bowen Geographer to his Majesty [London, T. Osborne, 1764]  
Size: 18.87 x 14.25 in.*

Once again at war with Great Britain, in 1744 the French in Mobile were protected by the vast wilderness separating them from English settlers in Carolina and Georgia. A peace treaty in 1748 was only a prelude to further hostilities. A new alliance in Europe between Prussia and Great Britain meant that the English navy ruled the seas. For the French monarchy, failure to truly make the settlement of Louisiana a priority was beginning to show. Greatly outnumbered by British colonials, France never supported, ruled, or encouraged settlers as effectively as Great Britain. After a decisive defeat in the French and Indian War (known as the Seven Years War in Europe), France ceded Louisiana west of the Mississippi River to Spain and gave land east of the Mississippi to Great Britain. According to the Peace of Paris in 1763, Mobile was now in British hands. French rule had ended, though the triumphant British would only hold Mobile and what was now called West Florida for a scant 18 years when the Spanish retook the territory.

Emanuel Bowen, engraver to George II of England and Louis XV of France, created some of the most beautiful maps of the century. Bowen drew this map to accompany a new history of Georgia for John Harris' 1744-48 and 1764 editions of *Navigantium Atque Itinerantium* Biblioteaca. It shows in detail the Indian tribes friendly or hostile to the British and the main trading paths. As the French left Mobile and the inland regions, the British firmly asserted their rule, establishing a peace with the natives after several Indian congresses and securing the pelt trade, the territory's primary export. During the American Revolution, British West Florida became a retreat for loyalists seeking sanctuary from the colonists, and ironically enough, enjoyed a mild, if brief, representative government in the form of an elected assembly and appointed council.

Map courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Southern History and Archives  
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# LA FLORIDA

de Chaves, Geronimo 1524-1574

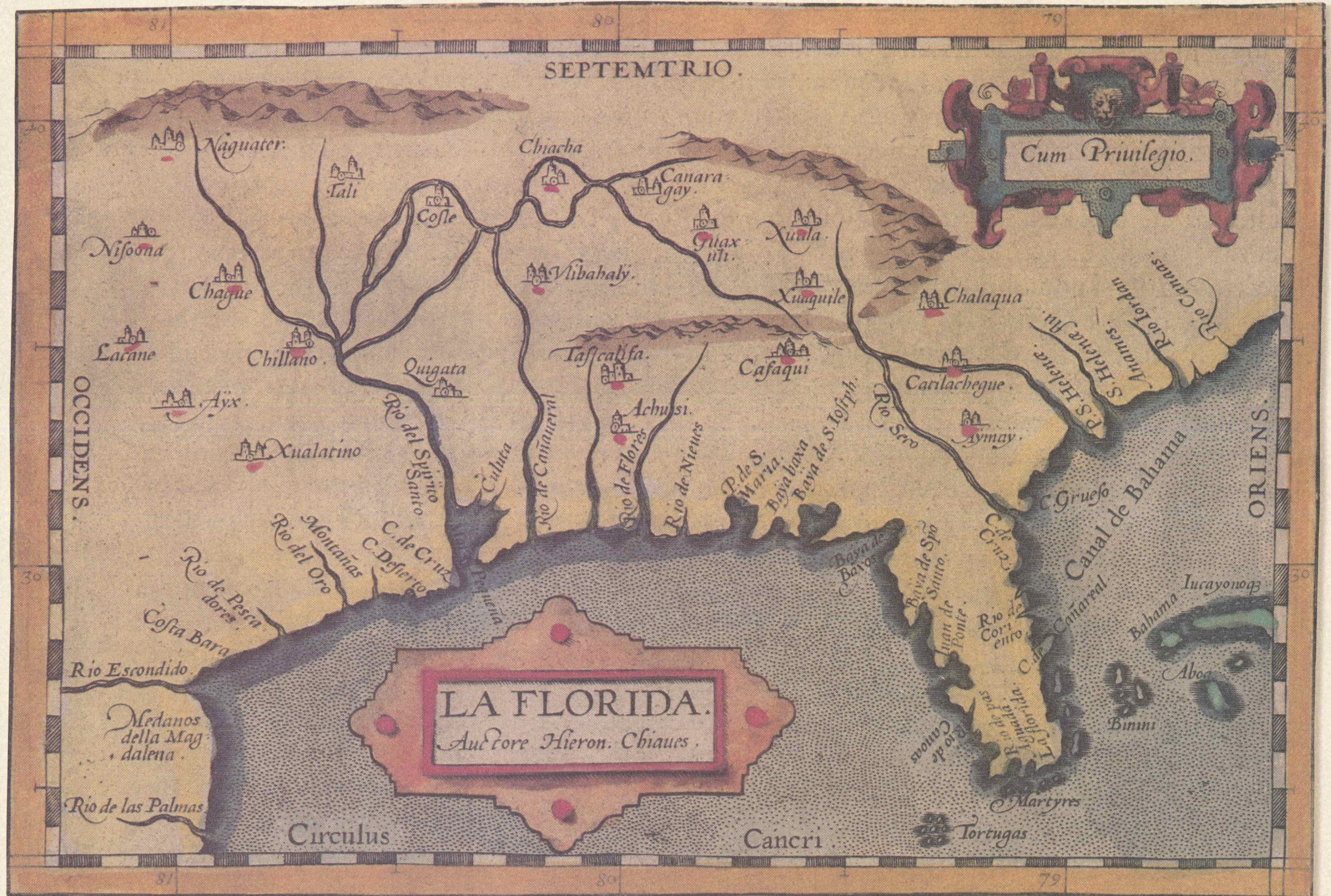
Auctore Hieron. Chiauses. Cum  
Priuilegio. Gvastecon Reg. [Antverpia  
Ambivaritorum, 1584] Size: 6.12 x 8.75 in.

Recorded history began in Alabama with the narrative accounts of four Spaniards accompanying Hernando de Soto on his entrada. Before the Spaniard's departure in 1539, Charles V appointed De Soto governor of Cuba and gave him a charter to conquer the land that explorer Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513 called "Florida," meaning "abounding in flowers." De Soto's expedition only increased Spain's desire to control Florida to protect the riches of the West Indies and Mexico from other colonial interests. Don Tristan de Luna failed in an attempt to establish a colony in Mobile Bay in 1589, but a few years later, St. Augustine was successfully founded. It would be more than a century before the French would supplant Spanish domination of the Gulf of Mexico and Alabama.

This map first appeared in the third edition to *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Atlas of the Whole World) by the great Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortel, best known by his latinized last name, Ortelius. The revolutionary *Theatrum*, history's first modern atlas, was the first systematically organized, uniform-sized atlas based on contemporary knowledge, thus non-Ptolemaic. Between 1570 and 1612, 42 editions of this influential work were published.

Chaves, royal Spanish cartographer for Phillip II, had an almost unique access to first-hand information from returning explorers. He based his map partly on the unsigned, undated De Soto map, the only existing map to illustrate the explorations of Hernando de Soto, 1539-1543. Interior names and configurations share similarities with the De Soto map, but the many omissions and differences between the two maps make any direct dependance by the printed map on the De Soto manuscript problematical. Having a Dutch draftsman and engraver copying a map made by a Spaniard further blurs the tracing of sources; however, few maps of the Southwest had a greater or longer impact on continental map makers than Chaves' *La Florida*.

Map courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library,  
Department of Southern History and Archives  
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# REGIONAL MAPS OF THE OLD SOUTHWEST ~ MAPPING THE ALABAMA TO COME

Maps are primarily about control. A symbol of knowledge, maps denote the ability to chart a region. It is an exercise in power and eventually, dominion. Those great blank spaces that once indicated the limits of understanding, through a map, are tamed and thus brought into the realm of possibility and experience. The nations that could transform these unknown regions into the known possessed more than just a symbolic power; they held the keys to exploitation. A map signaled possibility.

As the powers of Europe turned toward North America for new conquests, conflicting claims frequently overlapped one another as the New World was carved and recarved to suit the politics of the day. Not surprisingly, the best cartographers tended to be from the country that controlled the seas. In the late 16th century, the Netherlands, the foremost maritime power, produced some of the most beautiful maps ever made. The French court of Louis XIV created the first modern scientific maps in the late 17th century and early 18th century. And as Great Britain assumed preeminent control of the seas in the late 18th and early 19th century, her cartographers yielded the best charts and maps available.

Traders, frontiersmen, official expeditions, and armies brought cartographers an increasing array of information about the Alabama region, then known as the Southwest, vastly improving their knowledge of the area. The invention of the chronometer in the mid-18th century allowed the scientific measurement of east and west, further improving cartographers' accuracy. By the time Alabama joined the United States in 1819, American cartographers, armed with a more intimate knowledge of their own country, understandably began to make the best maps of the expanding nation.

Covering some 238 years of North American history, the five maps included in this collection each present a different facet of the emerging geographical, political, and cultural entity that would become the state of Alabama. Under the Spanish, French, British, and finally American flag, the region now known as Alabama passed through various stages of development from wilderness, colony, and territory to statehood. One of the few constants in the region's often turbulent history was that native "Alabamians," those people such as the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee, were arguably the only inhabitants with a full claim to the much-disputed land. But like the earliest European settlers learned, at least in practical application, the right to hold land ultimately meant less than the might necessary to keep it.

## 1. de Chaves, Geronimo. 1524-1574

*La Florida. Auctore Hieron. Chiauses. Cum Priuilegio. Gvastecan Reg.*  
[Antverpiae Ambivaritorum, 1584] Size: 6.12 x 8.75 in.

## 2. Mitchell, John. 1711-1768

*Amerique Septentrionale avec les routes, distances en miles, villiages, et  
etablissements Francois et Anglois, par le Docteur [John] Mitchel. Traduit  
de l'Anglois. Corrigée en 1776 par M. Hawkins. A Paris, le Rouge, 1777.*  
Size: 66 x 47 cm.

[French edition of John Mitchell's *A Map of the British and French Dominions  
in North America with Roads, Distances, Limits and Extent of the Settlements,*  
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## 3. Bowen, Emanuel. 1714-1767

*A New Map of Georgia with Part of Carolina, Florida and Louisiana.*  
*Drawn from Original Draughts assisted by the most approved Maps and Charts.*  
*Collected by Eman: Bowen [London, T. Osborne, 1764]*  
Size: 18.87 x 14.25 in.

## 4. Lewis, Samuel. 1754-1822

*Mississippi Territory. Drawn by S. Lewis, engr. by D. Fairman. [Philadelphia,  
Conrad & Co., 1804] Size: 8 x 10 in.*

## 5. Lucas, Fielding. 1781-1854

*Geographical, Statistical and Historical Map of Alabama.*  
*Drawn by R. Lucas. B. Tanner, sc. [Philadelphia, Carey & Lea, 1822]*  
Size: 11.5 x 9 in.



